An excursion to California over the prairie, Rocky mountains, and great Sierra Nevada. With a stroll through the diggings and ranches of that country. By William Kelly

AN EXCURSION TO CALIFORNIA OVER THE PRAIRIE, ROCKY MOUNTAINS, AND GREAT SIERRA NEVADA. WITH A STROLL THROUGH THE DIGGINGS AND RANCHES OF THAT COUNTRY

BY WILLIAM KELLY, J.P.

IN TWO VOLUMES. VOL. I.

LONDON: CHAPMAN AND HALL, 193, PICCADILLY. MDCCCLL

WHITING, BEAUFORT HOUSE, STRAND.

PREFACE.

DEDICATIONS and introductions are, I believe, strict matters of etiquette among the bon ton of the Republic of Letters; and, like many of the conventionalities of high life, produce a becoming effect when all other matters are in perfect keeping. But as I can easily imagine the feelings of a visitor pompously received in the vestibule by a powdered hall-porter, and ceremoniously ushered by a bedizened footman into a drawing-room most meagrely furnished, and wanting in many of the ordinary embellishments, I deemed it prudent to guard against such disappointments, by permitting any of the kind public who may honour me with a call, to lift the latch themselves, and step from the pavement into my humble parlour. I only adopt the preface lest I should be set down as a pert oddity, seeing that the middle and minor orders of the fraternity prefix it even to their pamphlets and pasquinades. I do not conceive it to be indispensable, nor, in fact, see exactly in what way I

can use it; unless it be in assuring the gentle reader that all the occurrences and adventures I narrate did really happen and befal me—that the children of nature who crossed my path are some more interesting, some more savage than my powers of portraiture—that iv the varied scenery I have endeavoured to describe exists in sterner grandeur and more captivating garniture than may be imagined from my feeble colouring—and that gold rolls in the natural gutters of California “and no mistake.”

At first I contemplated a series of pictorial illustrations to illuminate these pages; but having once seen an anxious crowd who were intently peering into a printshop, entirely diverted by the bursting of a gentleman's purse on the flagway, it struck me that the plates might be overlooked in the desire to arrive at the marvellous particulars relative to the existence and mode in which gold can be picked out of the dirt in that wonderful country.

It only remains for me to say, that the light style of writing I have endeavoured to employ was suggested somewhat on the principle on which a person, devoid of good vocal powers, attempts a comic song, in expectation that perhaps the humour may countervail the lack of higher attributes; and should any captious critic exclaim, “But nobody asked you to sing, Sir,” “Nobody asked you to listen,” suggests itself as the reply

Of the AUTHOR.

CONTENTS OF VOL. I.

Scenery—Stick in the Mud—Unpleasant Quarters—Wolfish Serenade—Indian Creek—Handsome Landscape—Indian Visit—Crossing of the Wakarusa; its Difficulties—Coon Point—Prairie Spring —Game—Absence of the Buffalo; the Cause—Effect on Indian population—The Shonganong —Bad Travelling—Break an Axle—Indian Settlement—Break a Tongue—Alarming Accident —Blacksmith's Shop and Residence—Trouble about getting him to Work—Reach the Kansas —Trading Post—Style of Trading there—Indian Fops—Ferry of the Kansas—Risk of Crossing —Catch some Fish—Beautiful Valley of the Kansas—Reflections —French Catholic Mission —Devotedness of the Rev. Father to his Flock and Pupils—Construct a temporary Viaduct— Approach the Pawnee Nation—Their Habits and Propensities—Attempt to steal our Animals —“The Vermilion”—Indian Interposition—Shoot Birds resembling Woodcock—Quantity of Wolves—Disappointment about the Position of the “Big Blue”—Bad Camping-Ground—Miss one of our Men—Protracted and fatiguing Search—Cause of his Straying—Directions to prevent such Occurrences for the Future 50 CHAPTER V. Second Start for the “Big Blue”—Prairie on Fire—Frightful Appearance impossible to describe—Indian Camp—Abundance of Fish—Jokes about the “Blue”—Dry Weather—Council—Dreadful Thunderstorm—Glorious Dawn—Beautiful Basin—Wolf Chase, and extraordinary Accident—The real “Big Blue” at last—Most melancholy Occurrence—Reflections on the sad Event—Commencement of the Mosquito Nuisance—Fertile Neighbourhood—Lay by a Day—Hurricane—Wild Turkey Chase—Number of Rattlesnakes— Our Fears of them—Missing Horses found—Indications of Buffalo—May Morning Thoughts of Home—Lovely Landscape—Quantity of Plover—One of the Party bit by a Snake—Bad Camping-Ground—Sudden Change of Temperature—Indian Wigwams— Their Shyness a bad Augury of their Intentions—Supposed Attack—Indians watching us—Surprise them—Slight Skirmish—Fish and Fowl plenty—Wagtails enemies to Constipation—Navicular Disease, how guarded against 68 CHAPTER VI. Mirage—“Little Blue” again—Rainstorm—Appearance of the Camp—Delightful Scenery—Reflections—Observance of the Sabbath—Fresh-water Turtle—Indians take the Shape of Wolves—Kill an Antelope—Visit of the Pawnees—Their Appearance—Short Description of the Tribe—Their Mode of Trading—Ugly Women—Pelican—Bluffs of the Platte—Saline Efflorescences—Grand Island—Dig for Water—Musquitoes again—Their Pertinacity—Novel Wager—Fort Kearney—American Soldiers—Profitable Price of Whiskey—Battle-ground of the

Sioux and Pawnees—Seagulls Inland—Hurricane and Thunderstorm—Stampede—Disagreeable Night—More Crystalised Incrustations—Prairie Dog Town—Appearance and Habits of the Animal —Accident to the Mules—Use of Lariats—Scarcity of Firewood—Unerring Signs of Buffalo—Amazing Size of the Herds—Ineffectual Attempt to cross the Platte after them 90 CHAPTER VII. Shaved Look of the Prairie—Speckled with Chip—Second Attempt at crossing—Successful, but attended with great Danger—Kill a Buffalo—Estimate of their Numbers—Prairie Wolves; their Sagacity—Narrow Escapes at Recrossing—"Misfortunes never come Single"—Crossing of the Buffalo—Flight of our Animals—Peculiarities of the Buffalo—Lie in wait for a Drove coming over the River—Shoot a Cow—Their Appearance at this Season—A November Robe the best—Gregarious Propensities—Interfere with the Progress of the Mexican Army—Buffalo Break—Meet a small Herd on our Path—Wound one—Account of the Chase—Nervous Affair—Mode of Preserving the Meat—Extraordinary Thickness of the Buffalo Skull—Test it by Rifle Practice —Our Camp—Obliged to drive our Stock on an Island—Rain saturates the Chip, and leaves us without Fire— vii Grumbling and Dissatisfaction of the Men—Some wish to Return—Persuaded to wait till we reach Fort Laramie—Buffalo Milk—Another Prairie Dog Town—Cheerless Landscape; Effects on the Spirits—Sagacity of the Mule—Miss some of our Men, who appear in the Morning greatly knocked up 107 CHAPTER VIII. Beds for the Invalids—Mode of decoying Antelope—Try it, and Succeed—Sleetstorm—Soft State of the Ground—Cannot find a Dry Spot to Camp on—A Lot of Mules get badly Mired—Continuance of the Storm—Dread lest the River should rise—The Indian Dreader alarmed again—Visit of a large Party of Sioux Indians—Handsome Caparisons—Reason of our Friend's Precipitate Return—Description of the Sioux—Their Costume —Mode of betokening Friendship—Exhibit our Trading Wares—Interchange of Presents—They leave, promising to meet us at the Ford in the Morning—Do not meet their War Party—Mode of Indian Burial—Find the Ford too deep for Crossing—Try it, but are forced to desist—Washing on the Plains—Sioux come again in a handsome Cavalcade—Beauty and Fascinations of the Sioux Women—Sioux Cleverness at Trading—Visit their Village by Invitation—Description of their Town and Wigwams—Juvenile Archery—Get a Cure for my Horse—Give an Acknowledgment of our kind Reception—Take our reluctant Leave—False Character given of the Sioux—River Falls—Wound an Indian by Mistake—Great Breadth of the Platte—The task of Crossing—Consolation in

AN EXCURSION TO CALIFORNIA. CHAPTER I.

Haul out of Dock—Gale of Wind—Anchor in the River—Description of the Company—All get on Good Terms—Weigh next Morning under Steam, Wind Unabated—Breakfast-table Scene—Sea Sickness—Cure by Vaccination—Sea ran so high, obliged to take Pilot on—His Feelings on the Subject—Barque bears down bound for Bristol, and takes him—Dreadful Squall off the Banks—Strange Meteoric Phenomenon—Description of the Passengers during the Gale—Yankee Pilot-boat and Pilot—Short Sketchy Reference to New York, being desirous to hurry on to the Prairie—Visit Boston—Superb River Steamer—Senatorial and Nigger Eloquence—Return to New York, and start for Albany by Rail—Description of that Mode of Travelling—Cross the Hudson on the Ice—Awkward Accident—Mr. Doheny in Albany—American Notions of Young Irelandism—Impostors—Laughable Occurrence.

WE hauled out of dock, in that fine steam-ship the *Sarah Sands*, on the morning of the 20th of January, 1849, but there was such a hurricane blowing from the west, it was considered not only useless, but exceedingly dangerous, to put out to sea in the teeth of it. So the anchor was dropped in the river. We were not over-crowded with passengers, having just enough to 2 constitute an agreeable party, chastened by the presence of some of the softer sex, whose charms and accomplishments dispelled the tedium and monotony of the voyage. Amongst the gentlemen we had every variety and shade of character, “both grave and gay, lively and severe;” some most amusing blades of infinite mirth, who were wont “to keep the table in a roar,” and, as usual on all such occasions and congregations, a *butt*, who unconsciously contributed to the cheerfulness and good humour of the society.

None were allowed on shore, as the captain resolved on starting the moment of the slightest lull; however, it blew on, with very little abatement, all day and night, and as the passengers had nothing else to do, they set about breaking the ice of formality with so very earnest a will, that by the time

the midnight summons was tolled all were on the most familiar terms possible, separating more after the manner of old friends than new-born acquaintances.

Before I had any idea of turning out in the morning, it not being quite light, I heard the windlass bousing up the anchor, and the wind also whistling through the cordage in C sharp; sounds that brought me on deck to see what was going on, when I found the ship just under weigh,with her propeller, not a rag of canvas being set, as the wind was dead ahead, still blowing great guns; but, as the vessel's trips were preadvertised, Captain Thompson would not wait another tide. When the breakfast-gong sounded we were abreast of the Rock light, pitching into it in most staggering 3 style, and of those who clambered to that meal only two of the passengers remained to finish: rather an early beginning, considering, I may say, that we were still in fresh water, barely emerging from the chops of the river. But this sea-sickness is a strange, unaccountable malady—infectious, no doubt, like yawning—for no sooner did one gentleman evince a disposition to retreat, than another uttered a groan, with indistinct inquiry for the steward, which proved the signal for a most inharmonious chorus, during which all the performers made their exit, leaving the table cleared of every one but the ship's officers and a pair of case-hardened voyageurs, who found found for mirth in the muffled moans that issued from the distant berths and state rooms, our gallant commander jocularly remarking, “Who would not sell a farm and come to sea?” As with toothache, there is no commiseration for the victims, because there is no danger; and like it, too, it entails exquisite suffering, without any “safe or certain remedy” for its cure or even alleviation being as yet discovered, though I believe the British Association have turned their attention to the matter, professing to deal with it by some process of vaccination, which, however, they have as yet kept a profound secret.

The sea ran so high outside the Light-ship we could not put the pilot on board his craft, and were, consequently, obliged to bring him on, in expectation of meeting a vessel down Channel to take him to port; but we took a last leave of the land off Cape Clear 4 without much subsidence of the gale, or an opportunity of transhipping him; much, I should say, from all appearances, to his great gratification, being anxious to see the New World on such favourable terms as a free passage, all found out and home, and his wages accumulating during his absence. He was a fine, active,

intelligent young fellow, and soon became a general favourite, and not wishing to remain idle, proffered his gratuitous services in any department; but the vessel carried so full and efficient a crew, they were most thankfully declined, reminding me of an occurrence of a somewhat similar nature that happened to a friend of mine at the *Punch* office, where some excellent original jokes were politely handed him back on the same grounds. I don't know exactly how the pilot felt, but my friend, I know, was not a little mortified.

The weather now began to moderate, but the pertinacious wind kept still confronting us until we reached a longitude about 800 miles to the westward, when we saw a large barque evidently bearing down for us, and our captain, not divining the object, hove to while she came within hail to ascertain our longitude, the weather being so hazy for some days back she could not get the sun. Everybody seemed to take an interest in the brazen colloquy but the pilot, who even retired from the deck, actuated by very opposite motives, lest his appearance might suggest the idea of sending him home, if the barque happened to be bound for a British port. However, in his absence he was not forgotten, for when, in answer to the question, “Where are you bound for?” 5 “Bristol” came down the wind, “Pilot, make ready to go aboard!” was sung out at the top of the captain's voice. I never saw a poor fellow so chapfallen; all his efforts to affect indifference were wholly abortive, and when taking leave, he hurried through the formula with a nervous precipitancy that let out the state of his feelings.

We now got a favourable slant which carried us to the Banks of Newfoundland, when one night, as we were all engaged, some at whist, some at chess, some in conversation, and others in hammock, going along smoothly, a sudden sensation struck us like that of the unexpected stop of a vehicle travelling rapidly. We were tilted against each other; the candles reeled; the captain (whose watch it was below) rushed on deck; and before we could coin a conjecture, the ship was labouring violently, and the stern roar of command, and the clattering of feet on deck, and the hauling of ropes, and the dread bellowing of the elements, announced a tremendous squall, which took us aback, and would, no doubt, have resulted in a most dire catastrophe, only for the promptness and cool energy of the captain and his hardy crew, who had taken in studding-sails, reefed topsails, and got the vessel under easy canvas, before one of the passengers ventured up to inquire “what was

the matter.” Some of us imagined the ship had been struck by lightning as well, for the mast-heads and yard-arm ends were studded with large meteors—a phenomenon new to us all; but no one dared ask a question; nor would it have been answered 6 were it asked, for all the men and officers had ample employment for their faculties besides giving explanations of the sort. After about half an hour some heavy drops of rain began falling at intervals; then suddenly, as if by touching the lever of a shower-bath, it came down in a plashing torrent, tumbling in a perfect cascade from the little quarter-deck aft the wheel. The wind soon succumbed to its potency, the crested waves were quickly beaten down into comparative quiescence, and, in less than an hour from the first shock, orders to make sail were passed, and the ship was steering her course under a clear and cloudless sky, so treacherous and fickle are the elements on the turbulent Atlantic at this season of the year.

Of course nobody was alarmed. It was a grand spectacle, worth coming the whole voyage to witness; but some melodramatic gentlemen who had descanted most eloquently on the imposing sublimity and grandeur of the war of elements, as if wholly divested of collateral consequences, were a little before simultaneously seized with a desire of examining their Prayer-books, whose gilt-edged leaves had never before been dissevered; our worthy butt, who was aroused from his pillow, demonstrating the entire absence of any emotion on his part, by sitting in the cabin amongst the affrighted ladies in a red worsted nightcap and a cutaway shirt; while Pat's characteristic exclamation, “Hould your tongue, ye haythin; if the Lord knows you're here, we're all done for,” might have been most aptly applied to one gentleman, who became suddenly 7 converted from the dark doctrines of materialism into a most sanctified professor of the Nicene Creed; but The devil got sick, the devil a monk would be— The devil got well, the devil a monk was he.

We had a good deal of joking, and divers and sundry bottles of mulled port before we turned in for the night, and a renewal of the fun at the breakfast-table next morning, asking for homilies from our devout brethren, and extolling the appearance of Mr.—in his new evening costume.

All the way across the Gulf Stream and the Banks there was very variable weather, shifty winds that freshened into squalls, and cold rains that were condensed into snow, as we approached the great western continent. We almost sighted land, and a pilot-boat at the same time, in the early

dawn of a clear frosty morning, which proved to be one of the Long Island bluffs; but we were all sadly disappointed on being told it was still 250 miles to Sandy Hook. The pilot soon clawed up the side, greeting the captain in the national intonation, “Captain, how d'ye you do, any how?” but looked a wee bit gritty as a cluster of innocents hovered around him to decide their various bets as “to how many buttons were wanting on his pea-jacket;” “how many guesses he would make in a given time;” “how many *calculations* he would enter into,” and as to “whether he wore earrings or not.” He gave us all the late New York news, and told us “we should meet *con* siderable of field ice in shore, as it was the most darned winter they had had for years back.”

8

I was exceedingly disappointed by the low, flat, naked appearance of the shore as we approached the land, without a natural beauty to meet the eye in any direction save the mariner's idol—a spacious and secure harbour. But this has been so frequently described, and is now so generally visited, I shall not detain my readers with a fresh portrait, the more particularly as my object is to get him on the prairie with as little delay as possible; neither shall I trouble him with any detailed opinions of the city, or my impressions regarding the striking contrasts presented in the different phases of society and commerce betwixt America and the old country. I conformed to the maxim, “When at Rome, to do as Rome does,” as well as I could, being nearly as quick on my legs as my Yankee competitors at the sound of the meal gongs, but left behind, like the dunce in the schoolroom, in the system of go-a-head mastication. I smoked my cigar with rather a sickening industry, but could never persuade my palate to relish the juice of the tobacco, or arrive at anything like artistic excellence in squirting it through my teeth. I reared up my chair rather gallantly on its hind legs; the recollection of an equestrian mishap, however, restrained me from emulating the excellence of those folk who can sit under the shadow of their own toes as complacently and coolly as if under the shade of a tree. But it appeared to me strangely incompatible with the refined delicacy and high-toned feeling set down by themselves as peculiar to the States, to see a gentleman occupying an entire window, heels aloft on 9 each side, and saluting a lady betwixt his legs; an attitude, to my mind, not peculiarly classic, and one which certainly behoves folks addicted to such a mode of salutation to have especial care about the state of their wardrobe.

I saw all the great sights, from the Croton Waterworks down, and visited most of the public institutions, which appeared to me well managed except the Post-office, which is still conducted on the old press-gang system. Strange, is it not, that, in such a city, the letter-carrying plan would not be adopted, affording as it does such useful facilities for delivery and communication? There was nothing going on at the theatres but low buffoonery, nor are those establishments worthy of so great a city. I went “special” with some ladies of my acquaintance to a promenade concert at the new Opera House in Astor-place, that I might gloat upon the boasted beauty of New York. However, I found that, like Sheridan's charity, “it is of so domestic a character it never roams abroad,” though I was informed all the *élite* would attend, and retiring loveliness be induced to unveil itself there: so that I was obliged to leave the city without being permitted to gaze upon those Broadway belles whom Jonathan vaunts as the angels of humanity.

During my brief sojourn in New York, I put up at, or rather permitted myself to be huddled into, one of those huge human pens in the Broadway which there are called “houses,” in contradistinction to the British synonyme of hotel, and found them even more distant 10 and diferent in their system of management than in their name; no doubt according and harmonising with the spirit of “ *free* and enlightened” habits and republican institutions, but strangely and uncomfortably at variance with the good old English style of conducting such establishments. As was my wont in the old country, I left my boots outside my bedroom door, where I found them in the morning, drooping as if in anguish at their total neglect, for it seems it is a matter of special contract with Sambo to have them attended to: the usual practice being to give them a daub and a rasp in the back hall after the owner is established in them for the day; clothes-brushing being accomplished in a similar way by a darkie with a pair of twigs, with which he beats a rat-tat-to all over you in time to the hum of one of his sable melodies. My bell was tardily answered by the wondering intrusion of a woolly-head, which, in reply to the demand for hot water, grinned most laughably a funny smile, and informed massa that “gemmen no shabe at home but go to barber's;” so that I was constrained either to try the process in “frigidum sine,” or go down to breakfast in the stubble; before which a printed notification over the mantelpiece caught my eye, whereby I was given to understand, that “unless I deposited the key of my room with the clerk at the bar,

the proprietor would not be accountable for my luggage;" a piece of information that stamped our Anglo-American cousins in my mind with the additional attribute of being "free and easy" as well as enlightened. The only other national characteristic 11 as connected with their "houses" that may be worthy of remark, is the habit of antiprandial bibation, for instead of composing themselves comfortably to enjoy the social glass from off the naked mahogany, they crowd into the bars before the dinner-hour to "swill their drinks," "suck their juleps," and "sink their bitters."

Being most desirous to see the scenery on the Hudson, I waited a few days, in expectation that the ice would break up, and enable me to proceed to Albany by water; and those I occupied in visiting Boston, going down to Fall River by the Sound, and thence by rail, choosing this route merely to have an opportunity of travelling in that magnificent boat the *Bay States*, that plies on the station. We have no such style of river-boat on the Thames, Clyde, or Shannon; her amazing size, the gorgeous and expensive manner in which she is fitted, and the extent and ingenuity of accommodation, far and away transcends any picture of imagination, while her power and speed were perfectly in keeping with her other qualities.

Boston I admired much more than New York; it is, in truth, a fine city, fair to look upon, extensive in its commerce, polished in its society, and governed by most excellent municipal laws and regulations; there are more of the true enjoyments of domestic life there than in any other city of the Union I visited. Wealthy merchants and successful professional men all live in their private houses, and keep their regular staff of servants (or helps, as Jonathan calls them), quite in the English fashion, some even attempting livery, 12 which, on its first appearance, created a great outcry, as an outrage against republicanism, creating badges of servitude and distinction while equality should be the invariable rule. I spent a day in listening to the debates in the houses of the Senate and Assembly; but whether it was that the subjects were barren, or the great speakers absent, I did not happen to hear any specimens of even mediocre oratory. I was, however, recompensed in the evening, by listening to the richest specimen of energetic declamation I ever heard, at a nigger prayer-meeting, during which the ebony preacher conveyed to me the delicious consolation, "dat eben de wild Irishman hab a soul to be saved."

On my return to New York, finding the Hudson still impracticable from ice, I started for Albany by rail, in a carriage that answers Dickens's description in every particular, the temperature of which was so smothering from the heat of the stove and confined air, I thought I should have an attack of apoplexy before I got to my destination, for all doors were carefully shut, and no one allowed to open a window, while at every stop I was shot from my seat against the opposite panel with a stunning concussion, Yankee drivers not caring to graduate their speed before stopping, as we do, but shutting off their steam at one stroke, come to a stand-still, with a shock as if the engine ran tilt against a battery wall, which is not only excessively uncomfortable to the passengers, but, I should say, highly injurious both to the machinery and carriages. The regulations, though, with regard to luggage, are 13 admirable, and prevent both fraud and mistake—a numbered copper label being affixed to each trunk or parcel, of which the owner gets a duplicate, which is required to be produced at the terminus before delivery.

When I arrived at Albany, I found the station-house on the opposite side of the river to the town, so I employed a light spring waggon to take me over with my luggage; and the moment I got up, seated on my portmanteau, the driver set off at a gallop down a steep incline to the river, as I supposed to water his nags, there being no bridge in the line; but in he dashed full speed, to my great dismay, plashing the water, which was full eight inches deep on the ice. I held my breath, and affected a composure that was every now and then awkwardly tested by a straining crack, as if the whole frozen platform was about breaking up for the season, being fully persuaded my hour was come, when one of the wheels-spun off, oversetting us, with a stunning crash, sending my portmanteau half scudding, half skating along like a miniature locomotive, and spreading me out in a sprawling posture, uncertain whether running or swimming was to be the next move. I was soon, however, in pursuit of the fugitive horses towards the opposite shore, leaving the driver to tow my traps into harbour.

In Albany I found the renowned Mr. Doheny, who had obtained the use of the Hall of Assembly to give to the curious PUBLIC “a full and true account” of his chapter of “moving accidents by flood and field,” at 14 the small cost of fifty cents a head. I made one of a large audience, who, it was

quite clear from their remarks and commentaries, were merely congregated to hear his version of the matter, and not from any interest in the prospects of his party, or solicitude about the fate of his companions. His address was well concocted—set up *rather tall*, no doubt, as Jonathan would say; the striking incidents dramatically arranged, and delivered theatrically; but his most studied efforts failed to excite a spark of enthusiasm; his hair-breadth escapes were unable to elicit a single thrill of sympathy; his choicest flowers of oratory were culled in vain. The memory of the illustrious dead interposed as a gloomy non-conductor; and while the Irish emigrant murmured his conviction that the death of o'Connell lay at the door of the Young Ireland party, the other section of the auditory muttered their distrust in the sincerity of the leaders of the revolt, sneering at the Tipperary rising as a parody on rebellion—that rising, forsooth, which was to wrest the brightest gem in the British diadem from the grasp of that powerful nation—a campaign got up without concert, arms, ammunition, money, or organisation; opened with a few dozen of the "hereditary bondsmen," ready to "strike the blow" from pure love of liberty, and the smallest taste in life of plunder;—but no, they must not infringe the sacred rights of property while they were excited to overturn a dynasty, and annihilate law and order; the revolution must be accomplished without an outrage; o'Connell would not have repeal "at the cost of a single drop ofhuman 15 blood;" Smith o'Brien would not accept a crown if it involved the sacrifice of a bleating lamb. "Touch but one sheep," he said to his hungry heroes, "and I will withdraw from the cause"—rather an unpalatable proclamation to the boys, who were licking their lips in anticipation of the sweets and feasts they made sure of enjoying: so, when the commissariat-general came back from the village with the few loaves and no fishes, together with the change in copper, the multitude had dwindled down most magically, leaving the hero of the memorable barrack-siege to wend his way to the railway station and give himself up to the authorities.

Thus began and ended that stupendous physical force demonstration which was to place the descendant of the great Brian Bhoru on the Irish throne, an independent sovereign, and inundate the land with milk and honey. Could any sane or honest man, or set of men, expect any such result from such an effort? "Pooh, pooh! gammon! fudge! treachery!" responded Jonathan; "it is all very fine, Mr. Doheny, but rather *steep* for credit."

While Mr. Doheny and some of his genuine brethren were giving their evenings at home in various localities, several impostors sprung up to minister to the public appetite throughout the Union, it appearing to be as easy a way as any going of gathering the dollars. Men, therefore, who were some years in the States, but still retained enough of the brogue, blarney, and brass, to pass for modern refugees, started this game, which was permaturely detected in Cincinnati, where a Mr. o'Neil, 16 placarded himself to appear on a certain evening, having accordingly presented himself to a well-filled house, in a herculean frame, uncomfortably overdressed; and, smoking with the vapour of hot rum-punch, he commenced by saying, “Ladies and gintlemen, I arise up forninst yees, to decant upon the sorrows and troubles of my poor country. (Cheers and pshaws.) I strugglid many a long day for her, and was *willin* to spill my *own* blood in her great and glorious cause, but the *vyle Saxin invaydhir* hunted me out from the bright *jm of the say*. (Loud cheers and hisses, and fluttering of whey-coloured wipers.) Och, ladies, it's aisy known there is some of the green-eyed* daughters of Ehrin amongst yees when I hear that cheer” —(Interruption, hisses, and cries of “Give back the tin!” “Go on!” “Humbug!” “Walked into!”)—during which the patriot bolted, getting out at a back door. This produced a great scene of uproar, some hunting the premises, and others giving chase in the street; however, Mr. o'Neil made a most effective display, for he successfully eluded pursuit with the entire proceeds. I did not remain long enough in the States to ascertain in how far the promulgation of this attempt affected the *regulars*, but the feeling of disgust and suspicion it excited must have been, I think, sadly detrimental to their prospects.

Quere -Dark-eyed daughters of *green* Erin.

CHAPTER II.

Start for Buffalo—Scene with a Yankee Railway Clerk—Relieved from my Dilemma by some brother Exiles—Meet my Friend in Buffalo with two Recruits—Increase of the Californian Fever as I went West—Visit the Falls of Niagara—Great Fall in my preconceived Notions regarding them—Fairy Suspension-bridge—Novel Test of its Safety—Description of the Canadian Stage-coach—Glance at the Country and Towns—Detroit—Cause of its Statu Quo—Start for Niles—Rough Jaunt thence to Michigan City—Description of the Country—Lose my Way—Meet some

Sulky Indians—Get right again after some Fatigue and Anxiety—Reach Chichago—Great Chain of Inland Navigation—Fine Farming Country on Fox and Rock Rivers—Melancholy Occurrence in the Vicinity of Chichago—Disagreeable Travel from that Town—Arrive at Juliett—Struggle on to Ottoway, a nice thriving Town—Its Manufactures—City of Peru; Wretched Place—The Post-office there—Get a Steamer to St. Louis—Affecting Steam-boat Disaster—St. Louis a fine City.

HAVING made an appointment to meet a brother voyager across the Atlantic on a certain day in Buffalo—one who promised to accompany me across the plains—I went to the railway-office early in the morning to ascertain the time of the starting of the train for that city. On entering the apartment, I saw before me on the counter the soles of a pair of boots, which I found were affixed to a long, thin-edged clerk, who was poised below in an arm-chair, mumbling a cigar.

“Is there an early train for Buffalo?” I asked.

“I reckon,” said he.

“What do you reckon?” I rejoined, smiling, without meaning offence.

“I reckon you sha'n't travel in it, any how,” said he, getting on his legs, in an angry mood.

“I require to get to Buffalo by the earliest conveyance. What's the fare?”

“No need for hurry. I'll let you wait till evening.”

“I observe by this notice,” pointing to one on the wall, “that a train goes at nine o'clock.”

“Well, you'll not travel in it; I'll make you go by the dear cars. I see you can afford it.”

“You shall not coerce me to travel otherwise than as I choose, and I warn you to refuse me a ticket at your peril,” I said, throwing down my eagle. But he coolly turned away, and commenced reading a newspaper on the desk; I tried, and threatened, but could not extract another syllable from him, and never was more provoked, feeling a tingling at my fingers' ends to have a go at him; but I

thought it the better course to remain, and represent his conduct to the directors. However, my anxiety to get forward was greater than my ire, for, in hurrying to ask the advice of my landlord how I should manage under the circumstances, I met in the gateway a batch of my country-men, "coming to *dhraw* their *passagis*," as they said, to one of whom I gave the eagle to purchase an extra ticket, by which means I got on, much to the chagrin of this autocratic servant, who absolutely dared to stop my luggage; but this I summarily stopped by an *argumentum ad hominem*.

19

A pretty specimen this of the laws and customs of the free republic, where a stranger's comfort and convenience is at the mercy of an impudent railway clerk, who can inflict the penance of extra cost and delay if you cannot comprehend in a moment his delectable slang!

It is needless to take up time and space in describing towns and cities, of which full-length portraits are contained in every handbook; while the country being enveloped in a shroud of snow, debarred me from seeing any variety of feature worthy of notice. I found my friend in Buffalo, with two Californian recruits, Canadian gentlemen, who were most acceptable companions, being men of education and ability. Although the Californian fever prevailed along the eastern seaboard, I found, the further I went west, the more intensely it became ramified; the scepticism, too, that accompanied it along the coast, vanished as I approached the banks of the Mississippi. There were several parties in process of formation in Buffalo, who had prospectuses published stating the nature of their engagements, and setting forth their rules and bye-laws; but they were not exactly the style of men we chose to herd with for four months, so we determined to hold on until we got to St. Louis, unless we happened to meet more congenial spirits.

As the lake navigation to Detroit was closed, without a hope of its opening for a month, we booked ourselves by a stage that travels from Niagara over Canada—a long and tedious route, but the only one practicable at 20 the time—getting to the Falls by rail, where we stopped a few hours to survey the celebrated cataract; but, like most other American marvels, it falls, in my mind, far short of its wondrous reputation. They are great falls, no doubt, measuring the body of water that tumbles over them; but they are neither nearly so high, nor so beautiful, as many of those in Switzerland, Ireland,

and Scotland, that I had already seen. I saw them, too, in their most attractive guise, corniced round with huge grotesque icicles, the rocks fantastically fretted in crisp snowy drapery, and sheets of disengaged ice plunging momentarilyinto the seething abyss below; and though I was vastly pleased, I was not exactly stupified with amazement, much to the annoyance of some Yankee gentlemen who were viewing them at the same time, vowing “they whipped all creation in the water *land*- scape line.” They present a grand spectacle, I admit; but are not, to use Jonathan's own phrase, “quite all they are cracked up for.”

My admiration was much more largely drawn upon by the exquisitely delicate suspension-bridge that spans the rushing waters of the river, which hangs at a distance in mid-air, like the slender threads of the silkworm, discernible only by the frequent weavings of its tiny wires; and even when approached and surveyed closely, looks rather as if it was intended as a thoroughfare for fairies than a human highway. Our luggage was trundled over in a barrow, but we were not permitted to follow until it reached the other side, which caused me to ask the toll-keeper 21 did he not then consider it safe. “Oh, yes,” he said, “perfectly safe; a *woman* crossed it the day before yesterday; but I must obey my orders.” To this conclusive reasoning I made no reply, but waited until the porter reached the oposite side, where I wished I was myself, without the gratification of viewing the foaming river through the wires.

There was a clumsy stage vehicle waiting on the Canadian side, holding nine inside passengers, in rather uncomfortable proximity with canvas flaps hanging down in lieu of windows, which neither answered to exclude the air or admit the light. I never travelled in so disagreeable a conveyance; and, to make the matter worse, we were doomed to a long tenure of it, as from the state of the roads, the winter now breaking up, we scarcely averaged a mile an hour, the wheels sinking the whole time up to the naves. The trip to Detroit occupied us nine days and nights, and I calculate that we walked at least half the distance, being frequently called out in the middle of a cold raw night to trudge up to our knees through miry roads, or have the vehicle stuck in the same spot all the time.

We passed through some magnificent country around St. Margaret's, Hamilton, and London, where the farm and farmsteads are fully equal to any in the old country, and the land rated at as high a

price. Detroit is a beautifully situated city, on the strait between Lakes Erie and St. Clair, but its progress is retarded by the dogged obstinacy of the old French inhabitants, who own most of the property on which it stands, and, like the dog in 22 the manger, will neither sell or grant such leases as would induce people of enterprise to invest their capital, nor will they improve it themselves; nevertheless it is a fine and stirring city, presenting a very obvious contrast to the Canadian city of Windsor, on the opposite side of the strait.

I got from Detroit to Niles by railway; but thence to Chichago I was obliged, with seven others, to travel in an open waggon. There are some comfortable and improving farmers about Niles, and along the northern part of Indiana to Michigan city. But after leaving this place, which is a dull, stupid village, built amongst sandhills, formed by the drift from the lake shores near which it stands, the road lies through a large forest; and as our progress was necessarily slow, there being no regular road, I took my rifle and started for a saunter, appointing to catch up at a distant landmark, and diverged off the path, in expectation of finding some deer, with which I heard the forest was well stocked; but after some hours' laborious beating about, without meeting game of any description, feathered or four-footed, I headed, as I thought, to the appointed place. When I arrived there, I could not find any indication of travel, and being very much tired, sat down for an hour's rest; but as evening approached without any sing of the waggon, I became rather uneasy, firing my rifle at intervals; and no shot being returned, I struck off in a westerly direction, in hopes of crossing the trail, fagging over five miles without discovering a trace, until I came suddenly upon some Indians, who were in a 23 swamp, killing musk rats, the skin of which is of some little value. I would have retired, but seeing they observed me, I went towards them, it being bad policy to betray apprehension, as it often leads to aggression where otherwise you might have escaped unmolested. I made signs to them that I had lost my way, but they were sulky and uncommunicative, and either did not understand my gestures, or would give themselves no trouble to inform me; so I was obliged to rely on my own resources, still pursuing a westerly course, resignedly considering how I should spend the night in the woods, when I heard the tinkling of some bells in the distance, and following the welcome sounds, found a large clearance and a little hut, in which there was a lone nigger woman, who came nearly a mile with me to point out a path that would lead me to where the few

travellers who came that way were in the habit of stopping. It was three miles further, and though there was very good moonlight, I had considerable difficulty in picking out the trail, which was a very faint one. I, however, proceeded, slowly and cautiously, and when very nearly tired down, perceived a glimmering light, which pointed out the solitary hostelry, where my companions had put up; they were at supper, and in deliberation as to what course they should pursue regarding me as I made my appearance, greatly knocked up, and with a greater desire for rest than refreshment; but a savoury plate of stewed beef and a bowl of good coffee elicited a capacity I did not imagine I possessed.

We reached Chichago next day, and found it in a 24 state of partial destruction, from an unprecedented flood, that carried away stores, wharves, and piers, bursting with such violence in the inner harbour, that ships and steamers were stove in by the force with which they were jammed against each other. Chichago is one of the most rising towns in the Union; and now that the canal connecting Lake Michigan with the Illinois and Mississippi rivers is open, must grow apace, as ships can, for the future, sail from the Gulf of St. Lawrence to the Gulf of Mexico by means of inland navigation, the Illinois being a fine navigable river, flowing into the Mississippi about fifty miles above St. Louis. Some of the best farming country in the States is in this region, particularly along the course of Fox and Rock rivers, the produce of which comes to market in Chichago; while large tracts of prairie around the city are under cultivation, producing the finest description of grain and vegetables. It is becoming a very favourite neighbourhood for emigrants to settle in; and were I to take up my abode in the country, I should fix my quarters here-abouts, with land of superior quality, great facilities for transporting produce, and good markets.

In walking over the common in the afternoon I witnessed a very melancholy occurrence, in the wounding of a lady of great respectability, who was leading her child by the hand for an evening stroll, when she was shot quite close to me by a fellow who, with a number of others, was indulging in rifle practice. He at first made an attempt to run for the suburbs, but afterwards waited until he was arrested. When I left next 25 day, I heard the poor sufferer's condition was nearly hopeless; so

that people in that country, inclined for an after-dinner saunter, had better arrange their affairs in the first instance, for I understand accidents of this description are of very frequent occurrence.

The next day's stage lay over a low prairie, which presented a surface of pools, lakes, and flashes, from the late thaws, that made it more a water than a land journey, and, as the fellow said who agreed to work his passage by driving canal horses, “I might as well walk as be after trudging in that manner;” being compelled to proceed most of the way on foot, as the horses were unable to pull the waggon through the miry ground, while, to add to our grievances, we were some miles from our quarters at sundown, and, in endeavouring to pick out the most favourable wading places in the gloaming, were frequently aswim in crossing the sloughs. However, we reached an old Dutch settler's in safety, where we billeted ourselves for the night.

The following day we crossed a rough but interesting country parallel with the canal, and got to Juliett, a new town, in a tremendous thunderstorm. It was our intention to perform the remainder of the journey to Peru by water in a small skiff; but the river was so swollen, we were recommended to put up with the inconveniences of an infamous road, and a worse conveyance, rather than risk the current. A pair of horses was all we could muster, one of which was as lame as a tree, making a team barely equal to the luggage, for it was only on firm level ground, and that in their turn, that 26 the passengers got a lift; nor could we procure any change at the village where we spent the night, so that there was no alternative but take the same conveyance on to Ottaway, a nice thriving young town, seated at the confluence of the Fox and Illinois rivers, and remarkable for the quantities of window-sashes made there; not in large establishments, but by a number of individual tradesmen, who send immense supplies to St. Louis. On inquiring the reason why sashwork was almost the exclusive employment, I had none assigned beyond this: that one carpenter, a few years back, began the trade, and as he succeeded, others commenced the same line of business, others still constantly following, until it acquired the pre-eminence it now enjoys in that branch of trade. The canal enters the river a little below the town, and a mile further down is the city of Peru, one of the filthiest and most abominable holes I ever set my foot in. It is one of those places got up by speculation; and I understand such was the rage at one time to become possessed of lots there, that they rose higher than in the oldest and most flourishing cities in the States. But the bubble burst, and Peru,

which was to have been worthy of its ambitious name, is now little better than an aggregation of noisome styes. It, however, boasts a post-office amongst its public institutions, but the postmaster is saved the rent of a house by carrying the mail in his hat, which he delivers as he chances to meet the parties in the street.

We here got the steamer to St. Louis, which was 27 crowded with a most motley, piebald lot of passengers, most of whom were bound for California, some by the land route, and others by New Orleans and Chagres. The Illinois is a splendid river, free, for the most part, from any obstructions to navigation, such as shoals, snags, or sawyers, with a swift current, and literally strewed with water-fowl, mostly of the duck tribe. It is generally densely timbered along the banks, so that there are no fine views, and even in the few open places the scenery is not beyond an ordinary character. Its waters were prodigiously swollen at that time; and at several of the little settlements at which we stopped to take cargo, we came alongside the stores, and received the goods from the second, and, in some instances, from the third story. Our progress was very much retarded by those numerous stoppages, for we did not pass a solitary shanty that a shore bell (the signal of goods for shipment) was not rung, much to the annoyance of the passengers. Coal was our fuel all the way, supplied at the different stations, which abounds, and of a fine quality, along the course of the Illinois, in a measure accounting for the continuance of the dense forests, as it is used in preference to wood.

Towards the close of the second day, as the shades of evening were beginning to settle down, we observed a halo above the horizon, in the direction where the sun had sank; but imagining it emanated from that luminary, we thought nothing of it, till it became quite apparent, as we advanced, that it was a lurid 28 flame, arising from some great burning pile; a little further, and the confused hum of voices came along the still calm air—settlers enjoying some merrymaking round their large log fires. But no; those are not the sounds of glee and mirth. Hark! there is anxiety in that shout—there, that is surely the scream of female terror. Yes; there is no mistaking it now; those are the hurried words of command—a catastrophe has taken place; and as we rounded a bend of the river we saw the funeral pile of a steamer, the flames roaring and crackling, numbers of human beings clustered in the arms and branches of the trees that stood in the flood where she was driven when the fire was discovered, and many standing in the water up to their armpits, holding

up females and children. It was a terrific sight to contemplate, for the sad wails impressed us with the melancholy conviction that human life was involved in the accident. We durst not approach too closely, but sent our boats off to relieve the sufferers, taking on board the ladies and children first; and long before the last man was on our deck, there was not a fragment of the ill-fated boat to be seen: the dark waters had closed over the last vestige of her hull. Providence, however, benignly spared all souls.

She was a superb new boat, owned by the captain, a young man whose all was embarked in her, who was just married to a lovely girl, and was spending the first phase of the honeymoon on board the virgin craft, that had too, on the same morning, espoused her destined element; and sailed proudly and gaily away from 29 St. Louis, with colours flying, bearing on her bosom the bridal party—sweet concurrence, arranged by the bridegroom in trustful lovingness of his youthful partner. They launched out together on the stream of life in the vessel of their hopes, and in the fair prospect that shone before them anticipated no reverse; it would have been a slighting of kind fortune to doubt her continuous sincerity by insuring the boat; but the same sun that beamed upon their first essay, sunk sadly upon their fortunes. The poor captain bore his losses bravely; and if a shade of melancholy passed his brow, it was more in consequence of his wife's dejection than at the untimely wreck of his entire property. The great accession of passengers left us in a very crowded state; so much so, that we had four sets of company at each meal; but we did not suffer the inconvenience long, as we reached St. Louis the evening of the next day.

St. Louis is a great commercial city, and is already styled the Queen of the West, from the rapidity of its growth, and the steady increase of its commerce. The streets in the older parts of the town are, unfortunately, rather narrow for the throng of business; but all the more modern ones are laid out with great regularity and sufficient width for any thoroughfare, built in a substantial and ornate style of architecture. The quays, however—the great arena of trade—are altogether too circumscribed for the requirements of the great commerce of the place, and present a scene of everlasting 30 and indescribable confusion, from the jostling and jamming of carts and waggons, and the shouting and altercation of the nigger teamsters; nor from the high value of property in the neighbourhood,

and the quality of the stores and buildings along it, does there appear to be much prospect of amendment in that respect.

31

CHAPTER III.

Pleasing Aspect of Slavery at St. Louis—Meet an Old Schoolfellow resident there—Takes me to see the Lions—Get our full Complement of Recruits—Decline Equipping until we reached the Frontier Towns—Town filled with Californian Placards—Streets lined with Californian Implements—News-papers crammed with Californian Advertisements—Hold a Meeting of the Company, at which I was elected Captain—All Novices in Desert-Travelling—Adopt a Costume—Give a Dinner to our Friends—Attend a Nigger Ball—Description of the Assembly—Get Turned Out—The Cause Explained—Start for Independence—Steam-boat Company—Their Tastes and Habits—The Missouri River and its Settlers—Wild Fowl; Wild Turkey—Rifle Practice—Jefferson City, the Capital of Missouri—Steam-boat Race; Nervous Affair—Study of American Customs—Left behind at Boonville—Exciting Race—Independence—Get our Outfit—Purchase Mules, Horses, and Waggons—Difficulty of Managing our Mules—Nigger Mode of dealing with them—Start for the Line—Indian Tribes; their Decline—Ravenous Pigs—Arrangement of Duties. AT St. Louis I got, for the first time, fairly into the region of slavery, the black, muggy face and woolly head of the nigger meeting me at every turn. Every menial duty, and nearly all labour, is performed by this race, who, slaves though they be, seem a jolly, contented set, generally on the broad grin, poking fun and jokes at one another; rendering it the next thing to impossible to pity their deplorable state, all one can do, while they themselves appear so provokingly happy. But I was obliged to soothe my conscience by admitting 32 to it, that notwithstanding the perverse contentment of those unfortunate beings, slavery in the abstract and in theory is a sinful, hideous, and abominable institution. I met here an old friend and schoolfellow, F. W—,who is established in the provision trade, which is the leading business of the place. It is quite a sight, visiting some of the stupendous curing establishments, to observe the gigantic scale on which they are carried on, and the new and curious contrivances employed in the process by which a pig is killed, scalded, cut up, and reposing in salt, in the twinkling of an eye, so that the echoes of his last grunt have not well died away ere

he is transmuted into bacon. All strangers visit those places as they do Barclay and Perkins's of London, or Guinness of Dublin.

In coming down the Illinois I made acquaintance of eleven young men, lately from England, bound for California; persons of respectability and education, with means, too, to fit out according to the standard my other friends and I had chalked out. We seemed mutually attracted to each other, and the moment the idea of union was broached they immediately acquiesced, making our muster fifteen; while an accession of ten more at the City Hotel of the same class completed the number we desired—twenty-five, all told; eight of whom were Yankees, two Scotchmen, and two Irishmen, leaving the old country represented in our party in the ratio of two to one.

We first intended to fit out in St. Louis, lest the traders in the two towns on the extreme frontier might 33 take advantage of our having no other resource, and run up prices; but my friend, Mr. W—, recommended us, at all events, to postpone the purchase of mules and waggons until we reached Independence, as it has been for years back the great starting point for the Santa Fe and Chihuaha traders, where trained and seasoned animals were more readily procured, and waggons suitable to the plains, built by men who understood, from long experience, all the requirements of such vehicles.

As I before remarked, the further west I proceeded, the more intense became the Californian fever. California met you here at every turn, every corner, every dead wall; every post and pillar was labelled with Californian placards. The shops seemed to contain nothing but articles for California. As you proceeded along the flagways, you required great circumspection, lest your coat-tails should be whisked into some of the multifarious Californian gold-washing machines, kept in perpetual motion by little ebony cherubs, singing Oh, Susannah, don't you cry for me, I'm gone to California with my wash-bowl on my knee.

Californian advertisements, and extracts from Californian letters, filled all the newspapers; and “are you for California?” was the constantly recurring question of the day; so that one would almost imagine the whole city was on wheels bound for that attractive region.

Acting on Mr. W—'s advice, we only purchased our rifles, pistols, broadswords, and bowie-knives there; but, as our company was complete, it was resolved to 34 hold a meeting to discuss the bill of fare, the rules of travel, and elect a captain to see them enforced, the ballot for which post of honour terminated in my favour by an unanimous vote; and, though I felt gratified by the compliment, I did not exactly relish the responsibility, never having had any experience in desert-travelling, nor should I have accepted it, only that all were equally inexperienced, and some one should undertake the duty. It was agreed to wear, in as far as we could, a uniform costume—green caps and jackets, with white trousers; and in selecting all our other appointments, we endeavoured to have them as similar as possible.

We gave a dinner the evening before we left to our friends and acquaintances at St. Louis, at which we had a great deal of Californian spouting and singing; but I contrived to get away early with Mr. W—, to attend a nigger ball, in honour of some African festival, which I was given to understand would be a rare treat to a foreigner, unused to the imitative gentility of the sable race. It is a matter of some difficulty for whites to get admission to those reunions, as jokes and tricks have often resulted from their presence; besides which, the niggers conceive they only desire to attend in order to ridicule them. However, Mr. W—got tickets through some of his own darkies, and we were admitted, but not without a rigid scrutiny. Although it was full nine o'clock when we entered, there was no one in the ball-room but the stewards, strutting about in all the pride of lofty shirt-collars and decorations, for 35 this assembly of “ *All blacks*” had their correct notions about the fashionable propriety of late hours as well as the titled frequenters of Willis's Great Rooms. Some of the earliest setting-downs took place shortly after our arrival, the ladies, in low dresses, tightened round the waist with an indentation more like a girth than a pair of stays; all wearing little kerchiefs of bright colours round their necks, with a sort of semi-turban on the head, of a regular rainbow complexion; and drops, of such dimensions and gravity as elongated the ears into the shape of jargonelle pears. Men and women wore white gloves, and their faces shone with a polish as if they washed in copal varnish for the occasion. There was also a deal of perfumery in requisition, but eau de Cologne and lavender-water soon became too strongly diluted with other essences to retain their virtues, bringing

to mind Dean Swift's couplet— Not all Arabia's spices would sufficient be; Thou smell'st not of their sweets—they stink of thee."

The orchestra was at the end of the room, and in front of it a refreshment counter, where mint juleps and oyster patties were served out. There were several old people amongst the company, all of whom had either a pair of bones, or a tin rattle in the head of their canes, to beat time, as they could not dance. Presently the fiddles and banjos struck up, when the floor was quickly tenanted; a movement very soon followed by a hurricane of sneezing, during which I also caught the infection; but the noise of those nasal convulsions was partly drowned as the "fun became fast and furious," raising up a dust 36 which, seizing everybody by the nose, set musicians, dancers, and spectators into such a paroxysm of sneezing as brought all simultaneously to a full stop. The ladies seemed ill at ease, too, between the shoulders, and many a fair heel was spasmodically uplifted to allay the irritation on the other leg, while others kept nipping their dresses, as if to annihilate some foreign intruder in the lining; in fact, dancing and fiddling now became completely merged in sneezing and scratching. I felt there was foul play somewhere, for my shins itched most irresistibly; but very soon found that the suspicion alit upon Mr. W—and myself, as the stewards, in a body, came up to us, sneezing, and gave us to understand, sneezing, the sooner we retired the better for our comforts and safety, as there was a great and general inclination to inflict condign punishment on us for what we had done. There was no use in attempting an explanation in the tempest of sneezing, so we accordingly withdrew,sneezing, and left this polished society to sneeze and scratch themselves to their hearts' content. We, however, ascertained next morning that some mischievous wags managed to get into the ball-room during the day, and dredged the floor with hellebore and cayenne, which, sent floating in the atmosphere by the beating of the dancers, produced the annoying results which led to our ejection.

The journey from St. Louis to Independence is accomplished by water, so we secured our berths on board the *Sacramento,* and though I was now tolerably well seasoned to the vexations of travel, there was such a 37 mob on board the boat, I would rather have walked, could I so have managed it, than be stowed away with them for a week. We had every variety of character—political and otherwise—Whig, Democrat, Locofoco, Loafer, Owner, and Abolitionist, in continual disputation,

wrangling about politics, contending about the merits of their respective champions, and only coinciding in their mode of manufacturing tobacco-juice. And I must say, all I before saw in that way was merely a type of the custom as compared with its inveteracy there; for they eat into a cake of tobacco as an English ploughman would into a cut of cheese,and this engendered such copious secretions of saliva, that the bilious cascades streamed out of the scuttle-holes, staining the painted sides of the vessel like yellow-ochre, and smearing the deck with disgusting blotches, which rendered footing perfectly insecure. The distinguishing featureof the habit being so abominably filthy, a gentleman on board suggested guano as a substitute, being “quite as cheap and twice as nasty.”

We sailed twenty-five miles up the Mississippi, where its clear waters receive the turbid Missouri, up whose stream our course lay for near 400 miles. At the point of junction it is much the larger river of the two, though it yields up its name to its more slender partner. We lay by every night, for the snags and sawyers on it are so numerous and formidable, no pilot would undertake to run after sunset, unless with a full moon and a cloudless sky. The country along its banks is, for the most part, thickly wooded and level, the 38 soil generally rich and fertile; but it is excessively unhealty, and the inhabitants or settlers are a gaunt race, with drab complexions, the exact reflection of the muddy current. It is not from the water, I believe, they imbibe their maladies, for when it is allowed to settle, although it loses its consistence it retains its colour, and makes a well-tasted wholesome beverage. There are numbers of dry bars throughout the entire river, which keep shifting, and thus changing the channel perpetually. They are covered with wild geese exclusively, for during the entire sail we never saw any other description of water-fowl, the ducks seeming to have their dominion on the limpid Ilinois, and the geese their kingdom on the Missouri. There were plenty of wild turkeys in the woods; but from a speciment that one of our passengers shot, they are not here a very desirable bird, for it was all shanks and wings; the steward, to whom it was given to prepare for table, asserting “the tarnation critter would soak more butter in basting than it was worth.” I suspect, however, it must have been raised in the regions of malaria, for there is no finer or more delicate fowl when you get it in condition, as I afterwards did when crossing the plains. We frequently saw deer swimming across, both ahead and astern of us, which afforded the Californians

fine opportunities for rifle practice; indeed, throughout each day it was an unintermitting fusilade, except at meal hours; and from the reckless manner in which some directed their discharges, and the awkward way in which others handled their guns, it was next to a 39 miracle that some serious accident did not take place, either on board or on shore.

We passed Mountpleasant as we ascended the stream, and Jefferson City, the capital of the State of Missouri, where we waited sufficiently long to explore the place. It is a small town, without much trade, or anything deserving of notice but the Senate House, which is more remarkable for its size and elevated position than its architectural taste. While lying here we were over hauled by another boat belonging to an opposition company, and as soon as she was discovered the bell was rung violently for “all on board,” and the fires heaped with fuel for a race. I am a great advocate for speedy travelling, and like the sensation quite as much as Dr. Johnston, provided I am seated in a “postchaise;” but in this instance there was a large drawback on my pleasure, for instead of sitting behind a docile team, I was cheek-by-jowl with a high-pressure engine,in danger of being cooked to a bubble in hot steam, or blown as food for fishes into the cold river. I looked anxiously to the shore, and felt a longing desire for a stroll in the woods, which became more intense as the black smoke gurgled out of the funnel; for though I did not study the science of “Fumography” in Paul Dogherty's school, by which “a man can tell by the smoke from the kitchen chimney what his neighbour has for dinner,” I was sufficiently familiar with the murky element to know there was an explosion in our pot if we persevered much longer. We have it on the authority of our ancestors, that a “hen on a 40 hot griddle betrays a world of uneasiness,” and I thought of the troubles of the poor bird as I fidgeted about the deck, with the hot resin sticking to my shoe soles; while, to aggravate the circumstances of our danger—though it was very evident we had no chance with our opponent—the order was still to heave on more coal and tar staves; and as she drew quite close upon our starboard quarter, the word was passed to “try a side of fat bacon;” but the question of speed being perfectly decided, the passengers unanimously remonstrated, and compelled the captain to postpone “the bustin” to some more favourable opportunity.

From the number we had on board, and the consequent consumption of food, our stock of provisions began to run low, so that at the second and third tables there was neither milk nor butter,

or a efficiency of fresh meat—a state of things which begat a more active competition than usual to secure places at the first table, making it a source of great danger to enter into the strife when the bell rang. I was generally content to await the second class; and as I stood behind the more fortunate passengers, waiting for a vacant chair, had an excellent opportunity of studying the Western mode of dinner tactics; when it struck me forcibly that the only way of ensuring expedition is to learn to perform all the evolutions with the same implement—a practice in which they all seemed adepts —first cutting the morsel with their knives, then feathering them, sailor fashion, tucking in with them meat and vegetables at one and the same time, slipping it from 41 the mouth into the " *sarse*," or salt-cellar, without losing a moment—a thing altogether impossible were they to wait to use the spoon. Nor do they pause for a change of plates, as if the several edibles and esculants went into different abdominal compartments; but with strong common sense and true republican abhorrence of distinctions, make one answer all the purposes, placing their fish, flesh, and fowl, molasses and melted butter, vegetables and bread, in proximate rotation; and instead of the slovenly fashion of leaving stagnant juices to settle and congeal, they them wipe all dry with a sponge of soft bread, which serves as the tombstone of the meal, and retire from the table, without waiting to pick their teeth with their tobacco knives—an operation in which they appear to take great delight, spending a pleasurable post prandial half hour in digging out the cavities and licking the blades.

We stopped at Boonville, a very nice little town, to get a fresh supply of provisions, when a lot of us took advantage of the period to look at a drove of mules a dealer said he had in a paddock beyond the town. On examining them we found they were all of the American breed, which did not suit, and returned leisurely towards the quay; but on getting to the hill overlooking the river we saw the steamer under weigh, and a considerable distance up stream. Our first idea was to run and engage a boat to follow; but then the absurdity of giving chase to a steamer with oars, soon again flashed upon us; so with one impulse we started at a quick run along the hill-side, entering a thick forest beyond the 42 town, where we were vexatiously retarded by brush and logs. About three miles up, the current of the river was fortunately concentrated into a channel betwixt an island and the shore, and ran with such exceeding velocity that the steamer could do little more than stern it; so we soon began to close upon her, getting within hail before she got through the gut; but there was a long tail

to our party, some being so far behind, the captain was with difficulty prevailed on to wait for them. We reached Lexington the same night, which is a stirring, thriving town, very prettily situated, with a fine and well settled country behind it; and next evening got to the point of debarkation, about three miles from the town of Independence, where a scene of bustle and confusion ensued it would not be easy to describe, as the time of staying was limited, the boat being bound to St. Joseph, sixty miles higher up. Every man acted as his own porter, and, in the numerous collisions on the gangway, several articles dropped over. One encounter took place in which the four belligerents stumbled into the river, which, though not deep enough to endanger their lives, had the effect of cooling their irascibility.

Independence we found precisely what Mr. W—described it—abundantly supplied with every article requisite for our outfit. We placed ourselves entirely in the hands of Mr. White, who is extensively engaged in the Mexican trade, with large branch establishments at Santa Fe and Chihanha, and, having crossed the plains several times to those places, was, from his 43 experience, enabled to give us many useful suggestions. We secured from his waggon-builder five of his best light waggons, several of which he had made in anticipation of the demand, and, on his recommendation, went out to the residence of Colonel Ralston to purchase our mules, who had several hundred, principally of Mexican breed, out of which we made a selection of forty-five, being six for each team, and three spare ones to each waggon, as relief animals, in case of fagging or accident. We also purchased three riding- horses for each mess, making fifteen, and a bell-mare to keep the mules together, as, strange to say, they form a peculiar attachment to a horse, and still greater to a mare; the bell-mare, which they follow through fire or water, superseding the necessity of herding or driving them; while, in cases of fright, they crowd and crouch round her like a flock of sheep, as if they expected protection; betraying, too, at times, a most amusing jealousy in endeavouring to get next her as they travel along, nipping, biting, and kicking each other, while the object of their affection treats them with the greatest disdain, spurning their advances with her heels —which, however, never provokes retaliation, though they are quick enough to resent an injury amongst themselves.

Our animals in all amounted to sixty-one, and we appointed Easter Monday as the day to come and take them away; meantime we were very industrious in getting our other supplies. The town of Independence is nicely placed on elevated ground, gently declining all around, with finely-timbered hills 44 swelling up beyond the slopes, which now presented a most animated appearance, their sides in every direction being studded with the tents of intending emigrants, with their animals picketed about, going to and fro all day, engaged in making preparations for their arduous journey; in the evening especially, when the several camp-fires were lighted up to cook the evening meal, the dusky forms flitting across the light, which illuminated, with its lurid glare, the grand natural arcades formed by the stately timber, it was a sight strange yet pleasing to look upon. Soft music, too, with its mellowing charm, came gently floating on the evening zephyr across the vale, adding its sweet interest to the scene. They were divided into several companies, some intending to travel with oxen, some with mules, all canvassing for adherents, in order to have as large trains as possible to be able to meet any Indian attack. Most of the companies numbered thirty messes, or waggons, and several as high as fifty, while our little band only counted five; but we were well equipped, each man carrying in his belt a revolver, a sword, and bowie-knife; the mounted men having besides a pair of holster-pistols and a rifle slung from the horn of their saddles, over and above which there were several double and single-shot guns and rifles suspended in the waggons, in loops, near the fore-part, where they would be easily accessible in case of attack.

Few of the others intended starting before the 1st of May, as the spring was unusually backward, and they apprehended a scarcity of feed; but on Easter 45 Monday we went out to Colonel Ralston's for the animals, having engaged an experienced teamster and two nigger assistants to help us. We had not much trouble in catching them, after driving them into an angle of the enclosure, where we got hold of the bell-mare, who was led quietly into town with her train of mules at her heels, leaving us the saddle-horses to ride. When we got in we drove them into a large railed yard, which we hired for the purpose of getting them into harness, and at this point our real troubles commenced—I may add, too, our pains and penalties, for there was not one out of the entire who escaped unscathed from the task. They were a most refractory lot to deal with; not an animal of the batch letting on the gear without a fierce struggle, frequently mixed up with amusement, for it was most laughable to

see a regular set-to betwixt a nigger and one of the mules, the mule rearing and lifting up Sambo, hanging on by the ear, into the air; who, the moment he reached the ground, ran at the delinquent with his head like a ram, butting him in the ribs, sometimes with such force as to completely stun “de dam son ob a jackass,” and in bad cases seizing the lug in his teeth, and holding on like grim death, while a collar was fitting or a britching being adjusted.

It was tolerably late in the day before our five teams were hitched up and ready for the road; but as we got into line, a finely-mounted and accoutred little troop, a man on each side of every waggon, in the plain but handsome uniform, we looked rather gay, and had a respectable throng about us, who raised a valedictory and 46 admiring cheer as we moved off, only twenty-five strong, nearly three weeks in advance of the remainder of the emigration. We only travelled eight miles, taking up our quarters near Colonel Russell's rendezvous, who was to lead a very large company across the plains that season. It was a fine night, our good stars seeming to shine auspiciously upon us. Discipline was now commenced, and guard relieved every two hours. Next morning we had another series of battles with the mules, but we got them in, and in motion, any breakage or accident, and proceeded over twelve miles of magnificent country to the Line—I don't mean the great globular girdle from which Mrs. Ramsbottom would give her eyes to get a few yards for a *Unick* bell-pull, but the line of demarcation between the pale-face and the Indian—the extreme margin of civilisation—the boundary agreed upon in solemn treaty between the government of the United States and the convocation of desert chieftains as the limit of encroachment—the point at which the plough of the hardy settler was to stop—where the hunting-ground of the red-skin commenced, stretching away into illimitable space.

The tribes close by the border are the Shawnees and Delawares, immediately beyond whom, on the Kansas, are the Pottawattomees: all of whom are partly christianised, and speak and understand a little English; but neither precept, example, or encouragement, can convert them into useful or industrious habits; for though game has become very scarce on the frontier prairies, they prefer depending for sustenance on its precarious supply to 47 raising food from the soil. They receive a pension from the States for the ground they have yielded up west of the Mississippi, which is paid themquarterly, through the medium of States' officers, called Indian agents, whose duty it is also

to prevent any whites from settling beyond the boundary, unless those who by intermarriage get tracts in right of their squaws. Smiths and carpenters, paid by the States, are settled at convenient points as far as the Kansas River, but not beyond, to make ploughs, farming implements, doors, sashes, and house furniture, or whatever else the Indians may require; but their labour is not much sought for in those matters; they are principally employed in doctoring old guns and powder-flasks, and repairing bridles, spurs, and stirrup-irons, as those neighbouring tribes pride themselves on the appearance and efficiency of such-like articles. They are kind and harmless, robust and good-looking, but excessively addicted to drink when within their reach. We had them constantly in our camp, and spirits was the only thing they appeared to desiderate.

We had here a fine field for training our mules, as we could start off in any direction without fear of an overset from gripe or gully; so every morning, the first thing after breakfast, we all mustered to harness them, and give them a good drive, lest idleness should cause them to relapse into their original mulishness. We waited here five days, and hired an ox-waggon, laden with corn for feed, to accompany us as far as the Kansas, as the grass was so short it would not afford 48 sufficient pasture. During our short stay we almost fed the stock exclusively on corn, which we got on very moderate terms from the neighbouring farmers. Mules are exceedingly fond of it, particularly in the cob, and shell it off most cunningly, without losing a grain. There is a tavern built at the point of departure called the “House of Refuge,” one half of it being beyond the Line, and consequently beyond the pale of United States' laws; so that, once within that wing, you are beyond the grasp of the sheriff. It is, I understand, generally well tenanted; and at the time of my visit had not a corner left for a costive debtor.

We were confoundedly annoyed, morning and evening, by hordes of half-wild hogs, which the settlers suffer to propagate *ad infinitum* in the woods: a most unsightly animal, long and stilty, like the old Milesian pig, but with a mane and tusks peculiarly wild-boarish. They are bold as brass, and fierce as tigers when provoked, displaying considerable sagacity as well; for although they were not to be seen during the day, they came punctually morning and evening as we were feeding our mules and horses, devouring the corn which we threw upon the ground. Some of the mules kept the interlopers at bay, but it required our united efforts, armed with great bludgeons, to get the

remainder a quiet repast; and in doing so, we were frequently turned upon by those ferocious brutes, who imbued me during my short sojourn in their neighbourhood with a perfectly Jewish antipathy to the whole swinish multitude.

49

In our camp on the Line we became regularly drilled into the duties and customs of our new life, and, by mutual agreement, took upon ourselves the several branches of labour involved in the journey—some consenting to drive, some to cook, others undertaking to wash, patch, and mend clothes, harness, &c. &c. &c., but all obliged to take their regular spells at guard.

50

CHAPTER IV.

Start Monday, 16th April—Feeling on launching out on the Prairie—Description of the Scene—The lone Elm—Disappointment—Bull Creek—Soaking Rain Storm—Pleasing Scenery—Stick in the Mud—Unpleasant Quarters—Wolfish Serenade—Indian Creek—Handsome Landscape—Indian Visit—Crossing of the Wakarusa; its Difficulties—Coon Point—Prairie Spring—Game—Absence of the Buffalo; the Cause—Effect on Indian Population—The Shonganong—Bad Travelling—Break an Axle—Indian Settlement—Break a Tongue—Alarming Accident—Blacksmith's Shop and Residence—Trouble about getting him to Work—Reach the Kansas—Trading Post—Style of Trading there—Indian Fops—Ferry of the Kansas—Risk of Crossing—Catch some Fish—Beautiful Valley of the Kansas—Reflections—French Catholic Mission—Devotedness of the Rev. Father to his Flock and Pupils—Construct a temporary Viaduct—Approach the Pawnee Nation—Their Habits and Propensities—Attempt to steal our Animals—“The Vermilion”—Indian Interposition—Shoot Birds resembling Woodcock—Quantity of Wolves—Disappointment about the Position of the “Big Blue”—Bad Camping Ground—Miss one of our Men—Protracted and fatiguing Search—Cause of his Straying—Directions to prevent such Occurrences for the Future. ON Monday, the 16th of April, we fairly launched out on our long and arduous journey, like a small fleet leaving a roadstead for the vast and trackless ocean, and soon left in the dim distance the last haunts of our civilised brethren. An inexpressible feeling of silent contemplation seemed to pervade the entire

company, as we proceeded without exchanging an observation for some hours. It was the first time that any of us had traversed 51 the lonely pathways of the desert; and the solemn stillness of uninvaded nature, the measureless immensity of the regions around us, fenced only by the horizon, produced a contrast most striking and impressive, giving birth to emotions that required to be cradled in thought and reflection before they took flight in utterance.

As I cast my eye over the broad surface of the prairie, it looked like a perfect level; still it is a series of immense undulations, like the huge lazy swells of the Atlantic in a calm. Vegetation was only beginning to sprout, but though the herbage was short, it was deliciously green; there was no object to break the monotony of the view—no hill, no mound, no crag, or bush—until we came in sight of "The lone Elm," a solitary tree, that stands upon the margin of a pool, like an outcast from the forest. We approached the water as we would an unexpected banquet, but, to our great mortification, found the putrid carcase of an ox rotting in the middle of it, emitting a stench that even caused our animals to taste it daintily. We reached a camping ground, twenty-eight miles from the frontier, called Bull Creek, the point where the Santa Fe trail diverges in a south-westerly direction; and found tolerable grass about the stream, with a miserable habitation, and an Indian attempt at cultivation. Though favoured with a fine day, as night came in black heavy clouds and floating masses of watery vapour gave indication of a storm, which burst upon us just as we sat to supper, blowing a hurricane, and teeming down torrents of rain. It was perfectly useless to attempt pitching our tents, as 52 they would be blown down; besides, the ground was running over with water, so that we could not sleep on it. We therefore took shelter in our waggons; and though I was thoroughly soaked when my guard was relieved, I went to sleep in my wet clothes, in a position not very conducive to repose, and awoke in the morning without any symptom of cold or sickness—a proceeding that would have been regarded at home as a species of suicide.

The morning opened finely, and we were after breakfast and in motion before seven o'clock; but the ground, saturated with the heavy rain, made the draught very severe. The country over which we passed to-day was more interesting, rising into more elevated slopes, and pleasingly diversified by the belts of timber that fringed the stream which ran across our path. It rather surprised me to find those rivulets so few and insignificant, considering the vast amount of drainage they have to carry

off; which shows there must be a very porous subsoil, for the deluge of the previous night had no perceptible effect on their current.

We expected to reach the Wakarusa that night, but in crossing a dell where the water lodged our waggons got so embedded in the mud, and the footing for the mules became so soft and bad we were obliged to completely unload them, and carry the contents on our backs in small loads over to where there was firm ground, which occupied us until dark, necessitating us to take up our quarters on the spot, without water, except that which welled up in the waggon tracks or 53 wheel ruts, which did not impart a very agreeable flavour to our coffee; but we had an excellent substitute for fire-wood in the dry weeds that covered the swamp, which ignited readily, throwing out a great heat and a brilliant light, and, I suppose, attracting packs of wolves, who favoured us with a most dismal serenade during supper, most provokingly prolonging it throughout the night to the confusion of the dreamers, and rendering it necessary to have a sharp look-out for the harness; for those ravenous animals would tear up all the softer portions of the leather unless they were driven off.

Next day we made a short stage, coming upon a fine fertile bottom, where, for the first time, we met anything like a growth of new grass. That was too tempting to pass by; as I thought a good cool repast after the dry, warm corn feeding, would be refreshing and invigorating to our animals. There was, besides, a further temptationin the wild loveliness of the spot, with a limpid rivulet, called Indian Creek, flowing along the base of a bold bluff, capped with timber, which held the sweet meadow in its embrace, on whose bosom the Indigo plant, with its pale blue flower, and the wild pink verbena, were just beginning to unfold their beauties, spangling the verdant carpet with their variegated hues. In the distance, to the south-east, a dense wood bounded the view, constituting a landscape that would not fail to charm the most enthusiastic admirer of natural scenery. We halted a second day in this lovely nighbourhood, and had a visit from some 54 Indians, whose huts were in the forest for the convenience of game, the deer being constrained to resort to the wood for pasture. As the natives in those districts burn the grass on the plains in order to concentrate them into a species of battu, they did not desire any food, but would take brandy if we gave it them; they were, however, content and grateful for some small presents of tobacco and beads.

The Wakarusa was only five miles distant; but there were several sloughs that crossed our route, compelling us to take long detours to avoid them, making our actual advance so inconsiderable, that it was noon before we got to the high banks overhanging that river, which is of a tolerable size compared with the other creeks and rivulets we passed. I should mention that the term “Creek” is applied in Western Prairie life to little streams or brooks, though its general signification is that of bay or indentation. The descent was a matter of extreme difficulty, from its excessive steepness and the sinuosities of the path; so we took out the two lead spans from each waggon, locked both hindwheels, and held back with ropes attached to the axle; but even with these precautions it was a very risky undertaking. I stationed double teams at the bottom, hitched-to the instant the waggons landed before they got time to sink, which pulled them over, and up the opposite banks, by a liberal application of whipcord, and a storm of shouting and holloaing, at strange variance with the usual repose of the locality.

Those sort of obstacles materially enhanced the difficulties of our march, and made large gaps in our slow progress of waggon travelling.

The country now for some miles became hilly and broken, covered with a debris of gravel and loose round stones, of a dark reddish tint. There was one very elevated bluff, called “Coon Point,” at the foot of which stands an abyss, with very good water; but we pushed on to a place called “Prairie Spring,” situated at the head of a grassy ravine, from which we startled a small herd of deer that were slaking their thirst at the clear fountain. One of our party also flushed and shot a brace of prairie hens, a fine bird, somewhat larger than our grouse, but resembling it closely in shape and plumage; the flavour of their flesh was exquisitely delicate, forming a very welcome addition to our otherwise invariable fare of fried bacon.

Some years back, herds of buffalo used to roam in unrestrained freedom over those plains, slain only as the wants of food and raimentpressed upon the Indian; but so soon as the fur-trading companies commenced their traffic for the hides, they were slaughtered without regard to the flesh, and the hides bartered for beads and baubles, until the incessant warfare drove them back upon

the banks of the Platt, leaving no substitute for food but the timid, wary deer. Whether the steady decrease in the Indian family is attributable to the decrease of their wonted sustenance cannot be well determined; but it is quite remarkable that since that period 56 the population has been gradually getting thinner, some of the tribes becoming wholly extinct.

Next morning we ascended from the ravine to an elevated ridge of grassy land, along which we travelled ten or twelve miles, enjoying a magnificent prospect on each hand of the boundless plains, intersected with their little aqueous arteries and lines of timber, that in some places resembled the studied planting of large domains; and probably, at no very distant period, this untenanted paradise will be dotted with the abodes of the pale-face, and its solemn grandeur dispelled by the busy activity of industry and commerce. We directed our course to the upper crossing of the Kansas, at the Pottawattomee Mission, or Trading Post, as it is more generally called, diverging from the more frequented track towards a small river, called the “Shonganong,” when our travelling became very difficult, from the entire absence of any path and the softness of the ground. The first branch of that river was altogether impassable, until we made a sort of corduroy sole, by cutting down trees and strewing their trunks on the bottom—an expedient we were also forced to adopt at the second branch, where we unfortunately broke an axle in one of the waggons; but, as we took the precaution of bringing a spare one to each, dressed, and ready for putting on, save the iron shoulders, which we took from the broken one, it was not so bad an accident as might be imagined; nevertheless even with this facility, it occupied us till dark before all was set to rights.

There is a small settlement of christianised Indians 57 between the forks of this river, under the immediate patronage of the missionaries; but their attempts at fencing and cultivation give bad promise of ultimate success; and the ménage of their household is quite on a par with their agricultural progress. They have had nice little log-houses erected for them, plainly furnished with chairs, tables, dressers, &c. &c. &c., all of which serve merely as ornaments, for they never use them, cooking their food in the primitive fashion, and squatting to their meals in preference to sitting at table. They have herds of small horses—animals of great endurance—but cannot be induced to keep or attend to any cows about the settlement, which, indeed, is not particularly well chosen, either in regard of the beauty of the situation or quality of the soil, being surrounded with

sloughs and morasses, in one of which we broke a waggon-tongue the following morning, and well nigh lost a span of lead mules, who all but disappeared in the mire, the middle span falling over them and snapping the tongue, obliging us to cut off the harness hurriedly, and drag out the topmost ones with ropes, two men standing up to their armpits in mud, holding up the heads of the others to prevent their suffocation. This second accident caused great detention, for we had to apportion the loading of the crippled waggon amongst the other four, until we got as far as the smith's, about eight miles off, where we expected to have the fracture repaired. We now got into a very hilly country, sparely covered with timber, some of the descents being so abrupt, that the waggons ran down on 58 the animals, even though double locked in the rough. We found the smith at home, in a very comfortable dwelling, with an excellent forge, established in Mission Creek, which flows through, and is fed by the seepage of those hills. Mr. Monday was surrounded with most of the comforts and necessaries of life; plenty of fine stock, abundance of fowl, excellent tillage, well-cropped gardens, and an illimitable scope of the finest grazing land. There were several Indians lounging about the premises and fiddling in the forge when we arrived; but none of them appeared to require the smith's services at that particular time, which led me to suppose we would have our job done off hand; however, Mr. Monday told me he durst not work for any but the Indians, unless by special leave from the States' agent, or the Indian appointed in that capacity by the tribe—rather a disagreeable piece of information, as the one was wholly inaccessible, and the other so very remote, that it would require two days to hunt him up. Monday, however, gave us permission to use his forge; and, though none of us ever attempted anything of the kind, we had no alternative but try; and we had actually commenced hammering out straps for the fractured tongue, when, to our great delight, the Indian chief was descried riding up. Monday stated our mishap to him; and, before he arrived, suggested the policy of a propitiative present; in compliance with which, I offered his highness a handsome sheath-knife, which he was graciously pleased to accept, telling Mr. Monday to inform us, “that, as we were travellers going on a journey beyond 59 the great hills, he gave permission to him to repair the damage,” a permission for which Mr. Monday subsequently demanded payment at a very exorbitant rate. We reached the banks of the Kansas at dusk the same evening, and had a levee of Indians and young half-castes from the trading-post round our camp-

fires the most of the night, on whom we had to keep a sharp look out to prevent their pilfering propensities.

The trading post is a small hamlet, composed of some half-dozen shops, and a little straggling suburb of wigwams. The shops are kept by white men, licensed to supply the Indians around with the flimsy, fantastic, and trumpery articles they require; liquor being specially interdicted, and very properly so. But the same kindly solicitude that prohibits the sale of spirits, should take some measures to protect those unsophisticated people from the gross extortion, the vile imposition, practised on them in those establishments, into which the whole of the Indian pension money finds its way. Gaudy patterns of flimsy calico rating as high as the richest satin; saddles, bridles, and spurs, of the very commonest kind, fetching a higher price than padded quilted articles of the same manufacture; and beads, rings, whistles, and little looking-glasses, all selling in the same ratio. They give them out on credit till the quarter-day comes round, when the poor Indian punctually hands over his pension to those unconscionable harpies.

There are not many Indians living immediately at the trading-post; but the day after we came to the 60 Kansas, being Sunday, swarms of them came on their ponies from the various settlements around, the older amongst them wrapped in particoloured blankets, while most of the younger portion were given to grotesque dandyism, attired in ill-fitting American costume; the great feature of the dress, and the one on which they principally plumed themselves, being very lofty shirt-collars and projecting frills, adorned with great platter brooches of stained glass, which I supposed cost them as much as pure mother-o'-pearl. We were in expectation of getting a supply of mocassins here, but those educated country gentlemen now deem such occupations entirely beneath them, leaving mean employments of that kind to their unenlightened brethren in the far west.

Early the following morning we discharged our tender-waggon, dividing the corn that remained equally amongst our own five, and moved down close to the bank of the river, which is here over one hundred yards wide, tolerably deep, and flowing with a rapid current. One of the white traders, in anticipation of the emigration, having built what they call a skow, a large flat-bottomed boat, capable of carrying a waggon loaded, together with the team—a very unwieldy craft, propelled with

long poles and clumsy oars, we chartered her for the occasion rather than run the risk of fording. The crossing entailed a vast deal of trouble and labour, first in getting the mules and waggons on board, then hauling the boat up stream near half a mile, to a point where the current, taking a shoot to the opposite shore, the painter was cast off, and she was swept 61 down more than half a mile before she made a landing, then after discharging her, she had again to be dragged up along the shore a considerable distance, drifting down again in the back passage, a series of operations that had to be gone through with the transportation of each waggon, and which tried our metal to the furthest. The loose animals we got over by swimming; one of our party taking soil on the bell-mare, who very soon was surrounded by her train of attendants.

We proceeded from the river a few miles up the valley of the Kansas, encamping on a quick clear stream, where we caught some fish. It is impossible to conceive a more lovely valley, lying between the river and a range of green grassy hills of most pleasing configuration, on whose brows myriads of delicate flowers, attracted by the genial smiles of spring, were peeping up amidst the sprouting herbage, with groves and clumps of timber budding into foliage, and blossoming shrubs skirting the plain along the stream, making it look like a favourite resting-place of nature, where I felt I could bury all aspirations of ambition, and, taking a long farewell of the busy world, spend the remainder of my days in sequestered happiness. And as, yielding to this blissful feeling, I lay down outside my tent on my prairie bed, gazing on the spangled canopy, which hung on high like a celestial chandelier in the heaven of heavens , the vastness of creation, and the omnipotence of the Almighty, filled my mind with a holy, reverential awe—a sweet transport of devotional meditation 62 —I never before experienced, causing me to imagine, when breathing my prayers before this resplendent altar, that I was more directly communing with the throne of Divine grace than in the carved and gilded temples of man.

There is a French Catholic mission at the extremity of the vale— the most advanced post of Christianity on the prairie—where the worthy minister has established a school in the little log chapel; and as I entered I found him in the midst of his half-tamed scholars, labouring to impart

the blessings of education, with a fervid zeal emanating from the purest sources of philantrophy, without any worldly incentive to feed it, or any reward but the consolations of a happy conscience.

Another obstacle to our progress presented itself here, in an immense tree, which was blown down in a deep gully that crossed our path, just in the place where the crossing was easiest. Its great size forbade any attempt at removing it, so we set all hands to work with spades and shovels, cutting an incline in each bank, which we accomplished much sooner than I expected, the deep rich black loam having neither a rock or stone commingled with it, being dug into like a turf bank. We also cut down some middle-sized trees to fill it up, as it was so narrow at the bottom the waggon perches would be in danger of breaking. From this we had five or six miles of very bad travelling, over a half-dried morass, the wheels frequently cutting through the sod to the axles; we managed, however, to pull through, and 63 reached first-rate camping ground before dark, on a nice cool stream, where the pasture was excellent and the scenery charming.

As we were now drawing close to the confines of the Pawnee nation—a tribe notorious for their adroitness it thieving—I caused the animals to be picketed compactly, in order that the guard could watch them more securely—a precaution opportunely adopted, for in the middle of the night we were all aroused by the sharp crack of a rifle, discharged after two of those savages, who crawled on their bellies in amongst the mules, and cutting two of the lariats, were in the act of leading them off, when the uneasiness of the remainder brought one of the guard to the spot in time to prevent the theft. He only got a glance at the Indians as they plunged into the thicket, but fired after them, with what effect we had no means of judging. We saw several rattlesnakes about our camp in the morning, and killed two of a very large size.

We nooned next day at the Vermilion, a good sized stream, running over a red sandstone bottom, that imparts the appearance of a reddish hue to its waters, from which I suppose it derives its name, though in reality the water is as clear as crystal. Having made it a point whenever I met any person who could talk English or make intelligible signs, to get all the information I could respecting our route; and in answer to my inquiries at the mission, being given to understand that from the Vermilion to the Blue we would not find either wood or water; I prudentially gave 64 instructions

that each waggon should take in a supply of those indispensable articles, when some Indians coming past, and observing, with their usual acuteness, what we were about, made signs to us to stop, motioning to us that “there was plenty of both beyond the hills, which we would reach this sun.” At first I was disinclined to run the risk; but as we had some very sharp ascents before us, and the loads were still heavy, I trusted to their gestures, nor was I disappointed, as we found a sweet purling brook and plenty of firewood.

We here shot several birds, most exactly resembling our own woodcock in size, plumage, and conformation; in fact, there was no traceable dissimilarity, nor, according to my palatal reminiscences, was there any difference of taste in the flesh; but the haunts and habits of the bird, associating in flocks on a naked plain, in the warm season, was so totally different from the woodcock, I could not believe in the identity. No one can appreciate the luxury of fresh meat so well as he that has been for weeks on salt rations; and believe me I enjoyed my modicum of the game, with a most relishable *goût*. An apprehension of being devoured by wolves disturbed our slumbers, such amazing numbers of them kept prowling and yowling about our camp all night. We shot two of them of a large size; well-knit animals, that would, I think, be a match for the strongest mastiff in a single encounter. They are very fleet, and possessed almost of the sagacity of the fox.

At sunrise next morning we were all astir, and had 65 breakfast disposed of, in order to be in time at the “Big Blue” (a large river), and cross it before dark. It is laid down by explorers as thirteen miles from the Vermilion, leaving it, by computation, seven from our camping-ground. We started early, and travelled steadily for three hours, making, according to our average of two and one-half miles an hour, some eight miles, when we met a lively limpid stream, shaded by fine elms and sycamore-trees; but its dimensions forbade the idea of its being the “Big Blue;” so we continued our course, constantly expecting to see indications of a large river ahead. The country all around was bleak and naked, high, rolling, unburnt prairie; but we persevered until the sun's course and our poor animals were near run down, without discovering the slighest appearance of it; and although I sent out our horsemen in different directions in quest of camping-ground, they were unable to find any better than a green stagnant pool, round the margin of which there was a dry coarse grass, that made sufficient fire to boil our coffee, those who were under the control of appetite being obliged to

eat their bacon raw. We skimmed off the slime from the water, and strained the dirty fluid through the tail of a waggon-sheet, which cleansed it somewhat; but it still retained an abominable vegetable taste, which we endeavoured to smother by putting in an extra quantity of coffee. After helping ourselves we let the animals take their turn, and, by the time they had done, the stuff left was of the 66 consistence of molasses, leaving us without the means of making a hot breakfast in the morning, and confining our fare to raw bacon and hard bread.

In calling over the roll in the evening, we were all alarmed at the absence of one of the party, who did not answer to his name, or return the signal of a gun-shot. No one could tell the cause of his leaving camp, nor could I clearly ascertain if he came up with the train. Having no wood to light fires for his guidance, our only alternative was to sally out in various directions, hallooing and firing to attract his attention; and after two hours' search, he was found at a long distance from camp; but as the party that met him could not communicate their good fortune to the others, they continued their search until morning, being, in reality, unable to find their own way back to quarters until the sun got up, and even then not without great trouble, so difficult is it to make one's way to any particular point without any landmark to guide you in those interminable plains. The cause of all this trouble and anxiety followed a pack of prairie hens until he lost his reckoning, and then getting confounded and alarmed as darkness closed upon him, set off at a brisk pace, turning his back on the place he wished to gain. I was more annoyed at the occurrence, as most of the party were so fagged they were badly able to travel, without even the comfort of a good breakfast after their night's fatigue; but the inhospitable region where we were constrained us to push on in search of better quarters. I gave directions 67 that, for the future, parties going out to hunt should be at least made up of three persons, for, independent of the danger of going astray, stragglers were in danger of being cut off by Indians, who from thenceforward were not to be overtrusted.

68

CHAPTER V.

Second Start for the “Big Blue”—Prairie on Fire—Frightful Appearance impossible to describe—Indian Camp—Abundance of Fish— Jokes about the “Blue”—Dry Weather—Council—Dreadful

Thunderstorm—Glorious Dawn—Beautiful Basin—Wolf Chase, and extraordinary Accident —The real “Big Blue” at last—Most melancholy Occurrence—Reflections on the sad Event— Commencement of the Musquito Nuisance—Fertile Neighbourhood—Lay by a Day—Hurricane —Wild Turkey Chase—Number of Rattlesnakes—Our Fears of them—Missing Horses found— Indications of Buffalo—May Morning Thoughts of Home—Lovely Landscape—Quantity of Plover —One of the Party bit by a Snake—Bad Camping-Ground—Sudden Change of Temperature— Indian Wigwams—Their Shyness a bad Augury of their Intentions—Supposed Attack—Indians watching us—Surprise them—Slight Skirmish—Fish and Fowl plenty— Wagtails Enemies to Constipation—Navicular Disease, how guarded against.

IT was late before we started, but we made certain the river ran on the other side of a range of barren hills, about eight miles distant; it took us three hours to gain their summit, from which we had an extensive view, without, however, any sign or symptom of the “Big Blue,” as far as the eye could penetrate into the distance; so I reluctantly came to the conclusion that the river we passed last evening was the one in question, but that we struck at a different point from others, whose estimate of distances confounded us. We observed from this eminence a dusky appearance in front, but were unable to determine at the time whether it was smoke 69 or a low black cloud; however, as we approximated, our doubts were soon resolved; it was smoke emanating from a prairie on fire right in our track, the flames travelling rapidly towards us, with a favourable breeze. I immediately ordered the prairie to leeward of us to be fired in several places, and the bell-mare to be caught, who with the loose animals were betraying symptoms of alarm, that I feared would cause them to stampede; meanwhile the fire came down upon us, roaring, extending north and south about three miles, presenting a grand, but terrific spectacle. The next move was to get the waggons into the space cleared by our own fire, and make the mules and horses firmly fast to the wheels. The smoke came drifting before the flames in dense hot wreaths as we secured the lariats,* the animals snorting and shaking with dread; and some of them rearing in affright, and breaking the tyings, bolted away wildly, until they overtook the flames behind them, when they rushed frantically back, plunging in amongst those that remained. The heat now became excessively uncomfortable, for our line was not over fifteen yards from the edge of the unburnt grass to windward, and we could not back the

waggons without loosening the animals. As the devouring element came closer, burning wisps were carried in the air, endangering our waggon covers and the powder-casks; but the heat became so intense we were forced to leave them to their fate, and prostrate ourselves, the smoke now gleaming with a murky 70 flame, at a perfectly singeing temperature, producing a difficulty of breathing, that threw Mr. M—n (a gentleman with delicate lungs) into convulsions. But those dreadful moments quickly passed away; a few more seconds and the last blade of grass was consumed, and the monster that threatened to lick us into his flaming throat vanished with the wind, leaving a bald and blackened plain around us. I had often read descriptions of prairies on fire, and thus became familiar with the proper mode of acting in such an emergency; but the graphic pen of Washington Irving, or the eloquent portraiture of Cooper, are tame and feeble as compared with the awful reality.

Long halters.

It behoved us now to be on the alert, as but a few hours of of the day remained, and, from the course of the fire, we could not expect to find any pasture for several miles; we therefore pushed along at a double-quick pace, until we descried a belt of timber on an apparently level plain, without hills or bluffs that would indicate a large river, where we found a stream of considerable size, with water the clearest I ever remember to have seen, even in a still well, and swarmed with fish, which we could see as plainly as birds in the air, darting about as we went into the ford. There were marks of a recent Indian encampment on the banks, at which no doubt the fire originated, for the prairie was burned just to that point, and no further. We formed ours on the opposite bank, and had a glorious fish repast on shad and catfish, which I eat for the first time, and found them excellent. Having caught as many at a few 71 draughts as furnished supper, and breakfast the next morning, this welcome change of diet put us all in good humour; and the evening passed away pleasantly, our wild bivouac resounding with the jocund song and the ringing laugh at the expense of those who were obstinate in their opinions that the river of yesterday was the “Big Blue,” one and all having agreed that the waters now flowing past us were those of that river, notwithstanding that its position did not tally with that assigned to it by trappers and explorers, nor its volume correspond with the recorded dimensions of the “Blue.”

Since our first night's drenching on “Bull Creek,” when we devoutly anathematised hail, rain, and sleet, we had not a shower or shade of lowering weather; but, like all capricious mortals, we had been heaving pluvial sighs for the last few days, which at long last attracted the sympathy of the elements, and brought down copious tears of compassion on our bereavement.

Before retiring to our buffalo robes, all assembled in my tent to examine the vacuous map of those regions, and ascertain the probable distance to the Platte, as well as shape our course, and agree upon camping points. While thus engaged, the rain pattered more heavily on the canvas, and at intervals a low growling of distant thunder came along like a mighty piece of ordnance in the heavens, rumbling louder and louder as it approximated, until it exploded with a bursting crash above our heads, that promptly broke up our council of travel. Brilliant coruscations from above flashing through the tent-cloth, betwixt the discharges paling the weak light 72 of the lamp; and as I went to the door to look on this awe-striking phenomenon, black fields of cloud hovered in the sky, fringed with a halo from the bright fires that glared behind them, opening momentarily in seams of livid light, and emitting spiral pillars of vivid fire, adown which, fancy would discover torrents of electric fluid pouring into the thirsty earth. It was a scene of surpassing sublimity, such as I never before witnessed; but its violence soon expended its fury, leaving us, ere midnight, a glorious starlit firmament.

A most delightful morning succeeded, and all nature seemed refreshed from the rain; the plains clothed with a delicious verdure, the lovely flowrets expanding their virgin bosoms, and emitting their fragrance in the balmy air, the sod beautifully elastic for travelling, and even the animals, I thought, looking sleek and glossy. We had breakfast over, our waggons greased, and teams tackled by seven o'clock, and set out, as we thought, in quest of another river, the course of which is more accurately laid down than the “Blue.” After travelling about eight miles, we came to a pebbly brook, flowing through a basin of the richest land we met yet, not even excepting the fertile valley of the Kansas, its velvet carpet decked out in a most gorgeous garniture of floral beauty. The larkspur, the wild pink verbena, the wild blue bean, and various others strange to me. I looked about for the familiar primrose, but it was nowhere to be found; nor do I think it might have hidden

its head amongst any of its foreign competitors, whose sweet perfume was overmatched by the pungent odours of the 73 wild onion, which I met frequently before, but never in such quantity or maturity. We gathered a large quantity, which gave an agreeable relish to our standing dish, and were productive of other effects of a desirable nature in our long vegetable abstinence. In going up the hill, I observed an animal stealing away in the long grass that bordered the brooks, and taking an off-hand rifle crack at him, materially quickened his pace, and extracted a sample of his vocalism. It turned out to be a wolf; and seeing, by his going lame, that he was wounded, all the horsemen gave chase, running him so close that they kept peppering him with their revolvers until they brought him down; but, in the careless eagerness of the chase, a misdirected or rebounding ball struck the nose of one of the horses, who made so sudden a curve that he unseated his rider, Mr. J —y, one of the most timid of our party, who was always holding forth about Indian surprises and ambuscades. A wag amongst the lot, seeing him fall, raised the shout of "Indians—Indians," and headed a retreat to the waggons at a furious pace, leaving my little friend "alone in his glory;" but, fearing the alarm might prove too serious a shock for his nerves, I went back to his relief, cantering up the rise to meet or hail him; however, he was nowhere to be seen. I then galloped across to the opposite hill, from which I had an extensive reconnoissance; but still he was not within view. I next made the horsemen scatter about, returning myself to the dead wolf, the place at which the accident occurred, and shouted lustily, the horsemen joining in the call at the 74 top of their lungs, without eliciting a response or appearance. I now began to feel somewhat nervous; but knowing from the time, distance, and expansive view, he could not have been carried off by Indians, I ordered and commenced a close search, which, considering that the herbage was short, and little or no cover for hiding, I felt assured would bring him to light; in fact, there was no place for concealment but a dry gully, about two feet and a half deep, bare of either reed or brushwood. Up this I rode without discovering a trace, when I became exceedingly puzzled and uncomfortable. On returning, however, I observed a fresh break in the surface, which I dismounted to examine, one of my companions observing it occurred in the chase; but not seeing any horse track near it, I stooped to scrutinise it closely, and conceived I saw a sort of pulsation, upon which I gave the long sod a drag, and down came about seven feet of a strip, revealing our missing friend, in a most pitiable plight. As soon as he recovered, he told us, believing the alarm to be genuine, he thought escape on foot beyond

hope, and seeing the overhanging bank in the gully, he crawled under it, but giving its edge a pull the more effectually to perfect his concealment, he brought down a fleak more than his strength was able to remove, and would have been smothered if there had been any loose earth or sand attached to it. At times, he said, he heard the muffled sound of voices, but could not distinguish whether they were Indians or not; and such was his veneration for his scalp, he preferred dying by the slow process of suffocation, rather 75 than disclose his hiding-place. He was too much of a sufferer to be a fit subject for joking; nevertheless, it was impossible to refrain from laughter as we thought of all the circumstances, and saw that he was unhurt.

We ascended from the basin to a high, undulating prairie, where there was a fine crop of upland grass, the first we met with. The soil was lighter than I had before seen, being only a few inches deep, on a dark flint-stone stratum, which occasionally peeped through the surface, like the limestone tracts in the west of Ireland. We had not travelled far before I saw a range of timbered bluffs, and soon perceived a large valley, thickly wooded with maple, cotton wood, elm, oak, and sycamore. This I set down as the camping-ground fifteen miles from the “Blue,” and cantered ahead to select a location for our night's lodging, when, lo! and behold, I came to a real veritable river, and no mistake, larger than the aggregate of all the creeks and streams we had passed. As the train came up “we looked each other's faces round,” and from the prevailing complexion I saw we all tacitly acquiesced in the conviction that at long last we had arrived at the “Big Blue,” though many, many miles west of the postion assigned it. It was a formidable stream to cross as well from its width as rapidity, but the in and out was tolerably easy. I rode on to take soundings, and select the shoalest ford, but only proceeded a few lengths when I got fairly aswim, and my horse, wheeling round with the current, went over on his beam ends, giving me a regular souse and a great start, as for an instant one of my feet caught 76 in the stirrup, but fortunately got extricated, else I should have been inevitably drowned, as I would be incapable of making any exertion—a lesson which taught me, on all subsequent occasions, to cast my feet loose before going into rivers or swamps, to be free for any accident that might turn up.

Making certain from what occurred that the water would reach our waggon beds, and damage the provision, those attached to the leading one commenced unloading, to place on the top what

was most susceptible of injury, when, melancholy to relate, a fine young fellow, John Coulter, in drawing out a loaded gun by the muzzle, brought the cock sharply in contact with a box, which caused it to explode, sending thirteen buck-shot clean through his body, instant death ensuing. The gloom that overspread us all was greater, I imagine, than if he met his fate in the haunts of civilisation, where a Christian burial would consign his remains to consecrated ground. But we dug his lonely grave beside a large elm close to the spot where he fell, and with uncovered heads and tearful eyes lowered his rude coffin into its isolated resting-place, carving his epitaph on the bark of the tree that overshadowed this tomb of the wilderness. What rendered reflection more distressing was, that we afterwards discovered a ford that superseded the necessity of any alteration in the loading.

After a short but mournful pause, we commenced the passage, which was attended with considerable danger and difficulty; however, we got over without 77 damage or accident. One small lead-span in the third waggon got afloat, and for a moment looked as if they would be hurried into the deep below them; but, like good-' *uns*, they headed for the right spot, and pulled out without a stop. Not a sound of voice or whip was heard in the crossing, and the same respectful tribute of silence was continued throughout the night to the memory of our departed comrade, who was esteemed and liked more generally than any member of the party; and as I marched round during my watch, under the pale scant light of a new moon, I never remember to have been so religiously impressed with the fleeting folly of earthly pursuits and anxieties, and the duty of at least dividing our solicitude and time in laying up treasures for a world to come; and yet, when I asked my conscience would it undertake a pilgrimage of 3000 miles over desert plains, encountering crosses, enduring mortifications, fording dangerous rivers, sleeping on the wet ground, tortured by musquitoes, in danger of the poisonous snake, and apprehensive of the savage Indian, solely in expectation of a reward hereafter? I could extract but a reluctant assent, while it bounded with impulse at the idea of an acquisition which admittedly makes the attainment of an eternal reward more uncertain and difficult—the camel and the needle giving way to the needle that pointed out the course to the mammon of iniquity.

Our camp to-night was close beside a grove, which appeared to be the head-quarters of the mosquito tribe, for they hummed and buzzed in myriads about us, 78 watching every opportunity of inflicting a wound. One is tolerably able, if his hands and attention are not otherwise employed, to defend himself in daylight; but their “inextinguishable hatred” pursues its victims throughout the night as well, and, if sleep should close your eyelids, unlike the agreeable results of Queen Mab's tittilations, you dream of needles and daggers, and start into stinging consciousness from the terror of being empaled on bayonets. It was amusing, spite of all the torture, to listen to the remarks and exclamations of the sufferers; and it is positively wonderful, that an insect so slender in all its proportions, can inflict so severe a sting, drawing blood through your coat: even the thick skin of a horse not being proof against its scarce visible lance. Unlike the fly, which only settles on the exposed surface of the skin, they go up the legs of your trousers and under the bedclothes; nor can any musquito bar wholly exclude them, for they will worm themselves into an aperture that you would suppose too small to admit an ant. Though we were pretty well tired, sleep was out of the question; so we all arose and made a monster fire, round which we got some relief.

Next day we lay by, our animals luxuriating in fine pasture, and ourselves enjoying rich treats of shad and catfish, together with wild ducks and parroquets, which were very abundant. We saw some deer bounding through the brakes, but could not manage to get within range of them. There were great quantities of the Indian or prairie potato about; a small but highly farinaceous esculent, too sweet for most of our palates. The 79 wild hop spreading its vines thickly amongst the trees, and amidst them thickets of wild plums covered with blossoms that gave promise of great abundance, the fruit of which I understand grows to a good size, and is of excellent flavour. Abundance of clover grew up amongst the indigenous grasses, some of which resembled closely our Italian rye-grass.

The wind during the evening was very high, but resembled a hot blast in its temperature—so much so, that the first guard turned out unmuffled, the others retiring to rest without any covering whatsoever. About ten o'clock, however, strange meteoric appearances began to present themselves in the north—the opposite point to that from which the wind was blowing—gradually becoming

more wide-spread and livid; when suddenly a small black speck emerged from the horizon, and, with the quickness of thought, the wind ran round to that quarter, increasing to a perfect hurricane, blowing down the tents, scattering hats, pots, kettles, blankets, and buffalo robes over the plain, tearing one of the waggon covers into shreds, and turning one clean over; while the embers and the coals carried about set fire to the underwood, which soon spread into a lake of flame, engaging several large decaying trees in the conflagration. It was a terrific sight, and so affrighted the stock, that most of them pulled up their picket-pins, galloping about, snorting and puffing, and keeping us busily engaged until daylight in looking after them. After morning broke, it 80 took us some hours to hunt up our truant traps; but many were missing, which I think were carried into the flames and consumed.

It was afternoon before the gale abated sufficiently to admit of travelling, and there was nothing of variety in the scenery, nor incident worth recording, unless it was a turkey chase, in which a fine bird was fairly run down. This bird, particularly when fat, cannot rise on the wing more than once, and then only for a short flight; but they make excellent use of their shanks, which are very lengthy, for by the time the one in question was caught, its pursuers were nearly piped out. It proved to be in very different condition from that shot on the Missouri, and as delicate as it was fat.

About twelve miles from the Blue we came to a nameless creek of most inviting aspect, so far as ourselves were concerned; but as there was no grass, the district around being recently burned, we pushed on a few miles further, where, on the contrary, the pasture was abundant, but the wood and water remote. I shot a brace of prairie snipe, which, though out of season, were very much in place, and in the course of the evening we killed three large rattlesnakes, of the most poisonous genus, quite close to our tents, which begat a nervousness lest some other members of that family should pay us a visit in our slumbers. There were several plants of the cactus, or prickly pear, about here, of a size that would make our home horticulturists stare, 81 and acres of wild onion in an advanced stage of maturity. The night was bitterly cold, and morning found us all ashiver, with three of our horses missing. The delay arising from which circumstance was the more disagreeable, as the exercise of travelling would have warmed and promoted the circulation.

After taking a cast about, we hit on the track of the horses towards the water, where we made sure of finding them; in which we were disappointed, and began to entertain fears that the Indians had got hold of them. But riding a few miles further to where I saw some timber, I joyfully descried the missing steeds, enjoying themselves in a magnificent pasturage; but by the time I got with them back to camp it was close upon noon, and as it was the second morning after one entire day's rest that we had a late start, I resolved on travelling till sundown, approaching which time we fortunately came to a clear, well-timbered brook. The country all day was of a level, monotonous character, without a feature of interest to call for observation.

For the first time we thought we here discovered symptoms of buffalo, which put us all on the qui-vive; some longing for the sport and novelty of the chase, and others talking in juicy accents of the luxury of a fine hump-steak. Our fires at night attracted some elk, bringing them within range; but as they were in line with the animals we durst not fire. At daylight we saw another herd crossing a ridge of rising ground, and three of our horsemen started in pursuit; however, as 82 there was no cover, they could not get within shooting distance.

May morning opened calm and cloudless; and as I looked around on the measureless tracts of old withered grass, unbroken by any striking object, unenlivened by any living thing, I thought of home, with its green lanes and hedge-rows of blossoming white thorn evaporating its dew-distilled perfume in the rising sun, and the weedless crops, and the shamrock-coated fields, and the frisking lambs and the woodland choristers; but the cracking of the teamsters' whips as they started recalled me from this agreeable reverie, directing my attention into a widely different channel.

The country to-day was more rolling, with a tendency upwards, until we attained a considerable elevation, which commanded a charming prospect, more diversified with wood and water than any I had yet seen, relieving the wearied eye with its pleasing verdure. Knolls of gigantic dimensions, covered with fine timber in young foliage, being irregularly scattered over the plain, which was intersected with numbers of streamlets, all tributaries of the “Little Blue;” clumps of trees standing here and there in the different angles formed by their courses, all it required to complete its pastoral charms being the flocks and herds, and the neat, but upretending cottage of the shepherd peeping

from the shady grove. As we crossed the last of those rivulets, we let all the animals, in and out of harness, drink their fill, and took in a supply of wood and water, so that we could stop 83 wherever the pasture was good. It was verging in the dim twilight when we reached a green sward, which, like the hospitable sign of a wayside boniface, induced the wearied travellers to stop.

A stand of prairie plover most opportunely made their appearance as we pulled up, all the tamer from the dim light, who were received by a simultaneous volley of balls and shot, that brought down as many as thirteen brace. They were in splendid condition—a size bigger than our plover, and a shade browner in plumage, but otherwise strictly alike. There were also indications which we set down as proofs of buffalo being in the neighbourhood, which kept us on the alert and look-out, some of the over-sanguine transforming every dark object into one of those animals; and, sooth to say, I do believe, when the mind is satiated in contemplating an unvarying sameness for several days, that it is more plastic, and prone to be the slave of our desires. We also discovered tracks of not quite so agreeable a character—the mocassin prints of a party of Indians, that must have recently crossed the dried-up bed of a neighbouring stream, which caused us for the first time to entertain positive apprehensions for the safety of our animals. One of our party got bit by a rattlesnake this evening; but, having a huge pair of stout leather boots, the fangs did not penetrate to the flesh. They, as well as large lizards, were very plentiful about our camp, but we were latterly becoming so used to them, we lost all apprehension about their entering our tents in the night. Not so the musquitoes, who 84 forced their way through smoke and flame, as each mess now lit fires opposite their tent doors (which the guard watched and kept alive) in expectation of excluding them; but the moment a current of air swayed the smoke in an opposite direction, a swarm of those untiring tormentors gained an entrée.

Next day's course was over a dreadfully hilly country, unadorned by bush or bramble; it was nothing but lock and unlock every half mile till noon, when we descended upon a level, bleak, unburt prairie, which in its dry and withered clothing of last year's grass had a most disagreeable aspect. We met no water since our start, and both men and animals were suffering from thirst; but, after travelling some miles further, one of the buffalo maniacs discovered some pools of stagnant stuff at right angles with our trail. Neverthless we diverged in obedience to that despotic appetite,

and found the green water absolutely alive with wagtails, as those piscious animalculæ are called; however, like the modern painters, not being over particular as to a shade or so, we drank it with avidity, though the mules sucked it in slowly, as if they filtered it through their teeth. Had we travelled on a mile further, we would have got a grateful drink of cool, pellucid water; but there is yet no hand-book of those unfrequented trails by which the wayfarer can time his wants.

Before us, in the distance, was a line of high land, that we knew must be the dividing ridge, beyond which the drainage tended to the “Little Blue,” which, unlike its larger namesake, did not deceive us or evade our 85 quest. Near the point where we struck it, three tributaries joined it from different directions, emerging in noisy haste from their umbrageous banks, and forming a most pleasing spectacle. We travelled the remainder of the day close along it, amidst fragrant groves of wild plums in full blossom, the temperature so warm we discarded vests and neck-ties; but about five o'clock, with the rapidity of a magician's presto, the sun was blown out by a cold, drear south-east squall, and, ere we could get our coats from the waggons, we were thoroughly drenched, the drops being so large as to scare the mules, who, maugre all our efforts, turned right round until they got their sterns to the gale; the rain soon cleared off, but the cold continued at a chattering temperature. We stopped at the first sheltered bend, and found about a dozen wigwams, empty, but nearly warm, they were so lately occupied. This, to use a Yankee vulgarism, made us “keep our eyes skinned,” as there was no doubt the wily Pawnee thief was in the neighbourhood. The storm continued unabated throughout the night and next morning; but, as all the grass about was clipped close, we were compelled to move on. Very soon after our start we came upon the remains of a very large Indian encampment, which it was evident was hastily vacated, and that, too, within eight or ten hours, as, in many of the heaps of ashes, the embers were still alive. From the number of cotton-wood trees cut down, they must have had a number of horses, and purposed remaining there a considerable time, for those hardy animals—the Indian ponies—subsist on the soft milky 86 bark of that tree during the winter and spring until the new grass grows up.

This coy conduct of the Indians was an unfavourable augury of their intentions; for, if disposed to be friendly, they come to camp to trade or beg, and travel with the party perhaps for many miles, from motives of curiosity, or looking out for opportunities to steal. I therefore conceived it

prudent to have all the arms looked up and loaded, ordering each man but the drivers to carry his full complement, and all spare guns to be laid in the most convenient positions in the front of the waggons, for, as our route lay up a narrow strip, with the river on one hand and a range of bluffs on the other, it looked a favourable district for a surprise. Two men rode ahead to reconnoitre, two more brought up the rear, the balance being along the waggons. We proceeded thus for some time in silence, when the crack of a rifle from the advanced party led us to suppose the affray had commenced. Every man now handed and cocked his rifle; and as we rounded an angle of planting, in close column, we saw the horsemen dismounted, stooping over a prostrate body, which, however, to our great gratification, turned out to be the carcase of a fine deer, which was hastily cut up and equally distributed. As we proceeded, I remarked two dark objects over the ridge, about the size of men's heads; and seeing them moving occasionally, I suspected they were Indian spies; a surmise which the glass confirmed. There was no use in endeavouring to steal on them, for all our motions were easily 87 discernible; so I ordered up five of our best mounted men, who, with myself, rode forward, as if pursuing our journey, to a point where the slope was easiest, where, like contending jockies coming to the post, we set off at top-speed. The distance up was less than half a mile; and when we gained the summit, we saw a party of about twenty-five, in full retreat on their small horses; until as we made a sudden bend for a more direct course, they at once pulled up, as we conjectured, to give fight; but a few strides more explained the motives of their conduct, my horse, who was leading, going chest into a moss-covered morass, canting me over his head with great violence, which caused the other horses, of their own accord, to stop suddenly, unhorsing another man, whose rifle went off in the fall.

This emboldened the Indians, who began to approach, discharging a few arrows at long range, which came rather accurately; but over sixty yards they can be easily dodged, as they lose their impetus beyond that distance. I was apprehensive, though, lest our horses should get wounded, not knowing but their arrows were poisoned; and as they persisted in coming closer, we fired two shots, taking deliberate aim at the one appearing most like the chief: they went off with a single report, one taking effect somewhere about the pony's head, and the other in the bridle-arm of the rider, which soon altered their course, causing them to fly with great precipitancy, occasionally looking

round to see if we pursued. My horse could not be extricated without getting ropes and help from the waggons, 88 nor even then without great difficulty: and was so exhausted by his own and our exertions as to be unable to travel; so we came to camp, when I returned, making a very short day's march of it.

We employed the remainder of the evening profitably as well as pleasurably, killing catfish in great quantity; and in the morning were gratified at finding all our night-hooks tenanted, affording us quite an epicurean breakfast. Amongst the fish on the night-hooks was a species of pike, called pickeril, which has a vast advantage over its relative, both in flavour and paucity of bones.

We still continued our course, with the river close under our lee, plover becoming so abundant, we were gladly enabled to give the salt junk a holiday, which contributed to improve our health and spirits. After a few hours' travel we diverged from the “Blue,” which took a sharp southerly sweep, and moored at a large flash of water, round which there was glorious feed; but the liquid was green, and full of wagtails: we were partly reconciled to its use, however, hearing that those little mites were active enemies to constipation, a malady then troubling the majority of the company. Two of the waggons here began to exhibit the effects of travel, in loose tires; but this was soon rectified, more uneasiness arising from the lameness of two of our best wheel mules, who appeared footsore for the last few days, and now began to limp outright; but on taking up their fore-feet, I found them panged with hard tough clay, in lumps, as horses gather snowballs, 89 preventing altogether the action of the frog, so necessary to ease and elasticity of gait, and certain at last to produce that incurable affection called navicular disease. I dug them out with a small chisel; and the moment they were removed the mules moved with perfect freedom. Every night afterwards I had the hoofs of all the work animals cleaned out; and I think all travellers would act prudently in doing likewise.

CHAPTER VI.

Mirage—“Little Blue” again—Rainstorm—Appearance of the Camp—Delightful Scenery—Reflections—Observance of the Sabbath—Fresh-water Turtle—Indians take the shape of Wolves

—Kill an Antelope—Visit of the Pawnees—Their Appearance—Short Description of the Tribe —Their mode of Trading—Ugly Women—Pelican—Bluffs of the Platte-Saline Efflorescenses —Grand Island—Dig for Water—Musquitoes again—Their pertinacity—Novel Wager—Fort Kearney—American Soldiers—Profitable price of Whisky—Battle ground of the Sioux and Pawnees—Seagulls Inland—Hurricane and Thunderstorm—Stampede—Disagreeable Night—More Crystalised Incrustations—Prairie Dog Town—Appearance and Habits of the Animal—Accident to the Mules—Use of Lariats—Scarcity of Firewood—Unerring Signs of Buffalo—Amazing size of the Herds—Ineffectual Attempt to cross the Platte after them. WE SAW to-day the celebrated optical illusion called mirage, so often seen and described by travellers over deserts and extensive plains. It was so wonderfully well defined, and in such apparent proximity, resembling a large grove of majestic trees in full foliage, that if it arose in advance, and not exactly in the track over which we passed a little before, I would have been actually deceived in the full and perfect belief of their reality. Now and then a change took place in their postures, and again in their density, openings occurring in which the glassy surface of a lake would appear, reflecting on its polished bosom the surrounding timber, 91 while on its distant shores the hazy outlines of a large city were spread out, taking the shape of massive buildings, domes, and steeples. It remained perceptible in its various phases for fully a quarter of an hour, and some of the party were so obstinate in their convictions as to its being a *bonâ fide* view, they actually rode in hunt of the shadow, but found it, as one of them described it, an “illigant representation of nothin' at all.”

Towards evening we came across our old acquaintance the “Little Blue,” where we camped in a delightful dell. The water so quickly shoaling, that no large fish came to repay our patience; we were consoled, though, by a fresh supply of plover. The evening closed so mildly none of us took the trouble of erecting our tents, spreading our bedding on the velvet carpet, with our heads pillowed on the scented flowers; but towards morning, as it came to my turn to mount guard, it came down a regular soaker, falling in perpendicular torrents, without a breath of air to slant it; yet the men were not much disturbed by it, sleeping on heroically, merely pulling in their heads under the blankets as the great drops plashed upon their faces. When the sun shone out shortly after, I

could not help gazing on the different couches, which smoked like melon-beds in its warm rays; nevertheless, they all arose healthy, cheerful, and hungry.

As we rolled along next day we got into a most gorgeous valley, where we saw several new varieties of floral beauties, amongst which I recognised the daisy 92 and two faces under a hood. The wild plum blossomed gloriously amidst the tall and stately timber, and the full round notes of the blackbird, with a warbling chorus of the smaller tribe of choristers, made up a sylvan concert, whose melody fell sweetly on the ear and stole over the senses with an enchanting pleasure—a chastened transport, that could only be felt in the pure theatre of nature, sequestered and apart from the influences of sophisticated associations. Detached parks of planting stood away in the background around this lovely scene; and green slopes, the types of luxuriant repose, made me almost envy the child of the wilderness the voluptuous garden bestowed upon him by a bountiful Providence, beside which the pigmy efforts of man were as time compared with eternity. Taking it “for all and all,” I gave this day's travel the palm for beautiful scenery over any other since we crossed the Line.

It was the Sabbath morning, but, being composed of different sects, any joint observance of that holy day was not enforced, each being left to commune with his Creator in what form of prayer he listed. The scarcity of grass disabled us from making it a day of rest; however, it was agreed that hunting, fishing, or such like amusements should be abstained from on all Sundays for the future—the smallest tribute we could pay to the Deity for the indulgence and protection deigned us in our trying undertaking.

Elk, antelope, and deer, were now more frequently seen, and by the aid of the glass the Indians were again 93 discovered watching our motions. We were now about to take a final leave of the “Little Blue,” and in filling our water-kegs, to be independent of that want, I caught an immense fresh-water turtle, weighing nearly one hundred weight, which made a furious battle, snapping at those near it, chopping its jaws with a violence that I am sure would fracture a leg or arm. It took more killing, as my countrymen say, than any fish or animal I ever saw; for, even after we cut it open, it

used to snap furiously. When boiled up in portions, with a little seasoning, it made a very rich and nutritious soup.

From the proximity of the Indians, we took our loaded rifles to bed with us, everything going smooth to the third watch, when the report of a gun aroused us all. Some Indians, it appeared, got in amongst the animals in the shape of wolves, the bark of which animal they can simulate to perfection, so as to deceive even old trappers, going all fours as fast as in an upright position. They cut four of the mules loose and mounted them, calculating correctly we would not fire for fear of shooting the animals; but the guards got on a pair of horses and gave chase, when they instantly relinquished them and ran off.

Very early next morning we were “a rollin,” as the Yankee teamsters say, and got upon a dead level prairie of withering grass; but about mid-day the country became hilly and broken, abounding with antelope, who, contrary to their usual custom, came so close we were enabled to shoot two of them; and as we were engaged in skinning and disembowelling them, three Indians 94 came up from behind a hill, quite unceremoniously, all smiles and bows, as if they were sure of a kind reception; but I had to beckon them away, as the mules became frightened at the fluttering of their buffalo robes and their novel appearance. One of them was a tall, well-proportioned fellow, not ill-looking, carrying an old flint carabine, spliced and cobbled, and so worn down in the barrel, it was, in my mind, a more dangerous weapon to the person holding it than to him at whom it might be presented; the others were dirty, repulsive-looking wretches, with bows and arrows, making gestures as if for something to eat; but being resolved not to give them any encouragement, we denied them a morsel, as they would otherwise accompany us, keeping round our camp, and stealing everything they could lay hands on. We did this as graciously as we could, giving them to understand that, as our journey was away beyond the great mountains, we required all we had for our own use. Shortly after, he carrying the carabine started off at a rapid rate to an eminence nearly a mile in advance, making signs that brought to view about fifty more, as quickly as Roderick Dhu's warriors rose from the heather of Clan Alpine, who, throwing their robes upon the ground, ran off in a lateral direction towards a dip of ground, where they were lost to sight, as I imagined for their arms, to avenge their wounded comrade, and pay us off for our inhospitable treatment; on

their reappearance, however, we saw that they were carrying skins, and robes, and one thing and another for trade. They first tried to steal, and were foiled; they 95 then sought to beg, and were disappointed; so, as a last resource, they came to barter.

This tribe (the Pawnees) were once amongst the most numerous and powerful on the whole Indian territory, with an immense extent of country; but in their conflicts with the Camanches on the south, the Sioux on the north and west, and the Delawares and Shawnees on the border, their numbers became seriously thinned, the ancient prestige of their supremacy vanishing at the same time; and as their power and influence decayed, the debasing spirit of theft and treachery grew up amongst them, banishing every trace of that innate nobleness and chivalry which is still to be found in the Indian race, making the terms Pawnee and thief synonymous, and degrading the tribes almost to a level with the Digger, who is considered to be in the lowest scale of the entire Indian family.

As soon as I was satisfied of their intentions I went out to meet them, making signs that they could not come near the waggons, as the animals were restless. Taking the hint, they opened out their wares where they stood, which merely consisted of buffalo robes, dingy and smoky, and some tawned deer-skins. We took all they had of the latter, as they were certain to come in handy in repairing harness, giving them some biscuit in exchange, but declined having anything to do with the buffalo robes, having no desire to add to the members of our company, for they actually seemed alive with vermin. I was in expectation of getting a few pair of mocassins, but they had none save those on their feet. There was one old fellow who had a tolerable good pair, 96 at which I cast some side glances, not so furtive, however, as to escape the notice of the wearer, who, observing that I desired them, made most amusing efforts to impress me with their value and usefulness. He shook his head most disdainfully, pointing at my boots; then walked off some distance in a most stately gait, nodding at his mocassins, as much as to say they would not cripple my action; he then passed one palm over the other, arching his arm, by which I was to understand they would carry me over the mountains; and we finally came to terms for those famous articles for a small piece of tobacco. Several amongst them were deeply scarred and pitted with small-pox; in fact, taking them as a lot, they were as dirty and wretched a sample of humanity as could well be found, my gallantry not

even enabling me to hold out for an individual exception amongst the softer sex, several of whom came up in the progress of the traffic, carrying their monkey-looking pappooses* on their shoulders.

Pappoose means a young child.

Mirage was again announced, taking the form of hills and broken ground, with a wavy indistinct outline, rising and subsiding at times like great banks of vapour. I was of opinion that they possibly might be bluffs along the Platte, which river we expected to make that evening; but my conjecture was no match for the active imaginations of my comrades, who discovered all sorts of preternatural appearances. Meanwhile, as we steadily approached them, the hazy veil disappeared, revealing a range of elevated hills stretching north and 97 south, moundy on the surface, and where they were broken showing a fine light rabbit sand. On their sides were numbers of antelope browsing on the short close herbage, and several animals, exactly like our hare, but of a light grey colour, resembling that of the rabbit.

There was a natural gap in the hills, through which we drove on to a perfectly level plain of about four miles, that intervened between them and the river, covered with white patches, which did not at first attract my attention particularly, till I observed some of the loose animals stooping and licking them with avidity; I then dismounted, and found they were crystallised incrustations of salt and soda. As we neared the river, the surface was more thickly and continuously coated with those efflorescences, assuming quite the appearance of one unbroken crust. It was high time to stop when we reached the bank of the Platte, but there was not a blade of grass. We proceeded a few miles without any improvement in the prospect, and at last halted close by the river, at the tail of Grand Island, so called from its extending ninety miles, being, I believe, the largest river island in the universe. It was well timbered with large willow and cotton-wood trees; but we had not a stick on the bank except the miserable drift brush which made a most wretched fire. We killed an enormous snake, very handsomely striped, called, I believe, the garter snake; a harmless reptile, and not poisonous, which are very plentiful in this region. The river is very large; wider than the Missouri in its 98 broadest opening, but shoaly and turbid, flowing rapidly over beds of quicksand, which in the eddies form into bars and conical-shaped tumuli, leaving the water at one place not over a few inches, while within a single step it becomes chin-deep; and thus it continues for several hundred

miles, incapable, notwithstanding the immense body of water that sweeps through its channel, of navigation for even craft of the smallest burden, while it would, if governed by the ordinary laws of other great rivers, afford a noble thoroughfare into the heart of the continent, and diminish many of the great difficulties of the overland route to the Pacific.

It is a dire but inexorable necessity that compels the poor prairie traveller to pitch his tent every evening in the neighbourhood of water, where, instead of finding rest, he finds the insatiable musquitoes awaiting him, who invariably put forth their entire powers of persecution, when, after the toils and fatigues of the day, his heavy eyelids begin to droop. A “monster meeting” of those infernal insects were arrayed on this occasion, fighting, too, with poisoned javelins; for, no sooner was the wound inflicted, than a hard base, about the breadth of a fourpenny-bit, was formed, swelling considerably, with an irresistible itching, and becoming still more inflamed as we indulged in scratching, till water began to exude, and an ugly ulcer formed. I never before suffered so unbearable an infliction, my forehead getting so sore and knobby, I could not bear my hat. Had I been on a religious pilgrimage, I would certainly have concluded that all my little 99 peccadilloes were fully expiated; but some even suffered more than I did, and others scarcely got a sting; for there are those whose blood they do not relish, while on that of others they banquet like gluttons; and there is no banishing them, for, chase them away as you will, they still return and finish their meal where they began it. We sought temporary relief in the river, our enemies hovering over us, and whetting their daggers all the time. During the bath a most original wager was made betwixt two young fellows, that one should remain exposed without his clothes longer than the other, each acquiescing in the use of cigars; so, after lighting them, down they lay on the bank, contiguous to each other, wincing as a sting was inflicted on a tender quarter, and smoking with a fiercer energy as the pain became more excessive. Both held out manfully for five minutes, when G__y, in the act of giving up the contest, playfully touched the rear of his adversary with the end of his cigar, causing him to jump up in an agony, swearing “he could not stand it any longer, for the father of the flock had stabbed him.”

Next day we proceeded up the valley of the Platte, which is perfectly level for some hundreds of miles, with just enough of incline to give the river its current. After travelling briskly for some

hours, we did not appear to have advanced a mile, so much is the unpractised eye deceived in surveying those interminable plains. We reached Fort Kearney early in the evening— 100 if fort it can be called—where the States have stationed a garrison of soldiers, in a string of log-huts, for the protection of the emigrants; and a most unsoldierly-looking lot they were—unshaven, unshorn, with patched uniforms, and lounging gait. Both men and officers were ill off for some necessaries, such as flour and sugar; the privates being more particular in their inquiries after whisky, for which they offered one dollar the half-pint; but we had none to sell even at that tempting price.

We kept close along the river the following day, which was studded over with low sedgy islets, partaking nothing of the picturesque, being quite on a par in that respect with the naked bluffs on the other hand. Towards noon we came to a place which had quite a Golgotha-like appearance, being thickly strewed over with bones and skulls, the results of Indian conflicts, as the valley of the Platte is the great battle-ground of the Sioux and Pawnees, both of which tribes, we were informed by some dragoons who came thus far with us from the fort in search of missing horses, were busily employed in preparing for an active summer's campaign—an event calculated to cause a stir in the price of vermilion and black paint, in both of which colours the warriors bedaub themselves in a most grotesque manner before marching to the encounter. The dragoons told us we might expect to meet the war party of the Sioux on their way down; a pleasure we would have all very gladly declined, if possible.

Flocks of seagulls, and what we call maybirds, a species of curlew, kept flying about us all day, and I was not a little surprised to find them far away from their element. We had another sublime but terrific conflict of the elements in the evening, not confined to one quarter, but pervading the entire heavens. It commenced by a portentous calm, that caused us all to listen intuitively, as if aware that something awful was approaching; black clouds soon after began rolling up from the edges of the horizon, accompanied with fitful squalls that almost rocked the waggons off their balance, and intermitting torrents that fell in large globules. About eleven o'clock it again became sullenly calm, and the sky obscured with a jet-black curtain, which enveloped us in Cimmerian darkness; but at times a blaze of sheet lightning behind would throw a lurid gleam through, producing the grandest

imaginable effect; and then, as if rent in pieces by prolonged peals of thunder, showers of electric fluid poured from the clouds, rendering the most minute objects momentarily visible, and enabling us to see that the majority of our mules had pulled up their pins and stampeded. As soon as the fireworks got on the wane the waterworks commenced in real earnest, keeping up a striking analogy to Vauxhall; but as the loss of the mules would be disastrous in the last degree, we mounted all the saddle-horses which were tied up to the waggon wheels, and commenced a most novel but nervous chase, following up our frighted game by the aid of the lightning, 102 which at times almost blinded us, making our horses shiver and snort, and bewildering the mules, who kept wheeling about, not knowing in what direction to seek escape, we were thus fortunately enabled to get amongst them, and tie their lariats in bunches attached to the horns of our saddles. The storm now settled down into heavy, constant rain, in which we made several ineffectual attempts to retrace our steps, but were finally compelled to dismount, and sit down contentedly on the wet ground, under this shower-bath, until daylight, when the sun soon put all the vapours to flight. It was about five miles from our camp, and by the time we reached it, breakfast being prepared, we did not wait to change our garments, as the exercise and the hot sun had dried them on our backs.

The saline efflorescences were again coated over the plain far and near, and the stock appeared to enjoy the licking of it more than the choicest feeding. From this point the valley began to narrow, and became more interesting, the bluffs getting bolder, and sparsely covered with fine cedar; the vegetation, too, began to improve, rich clover and grasses, commingled with wild vetch, now forming its pod, making up an ollapodrida that must have been wonderfully nutritious. In the course of the day we saw in the midst of the verdure a red arid space covering fifty acres, which was what trappers call a prairie dog village. It was very thickly inhabited, but they treated us inhospitably, withdrawing into their domiciles as we entered the suburbs. 103 They burrow like a rabbit, and at the mouth of each hole have a tumulus, on which they delight to sit and sun themselves. They subsist on herbs, but, not content with the surface supply, they gnaw up the roots, killing all vegetation in the neighbourhood when they shift their quarters into a new territory. They are scarcely so large as a grazier or young rabbit, with a light hairy skin, a head and tail, and a miniature bark like a young pup. Some of our party tried them in broth, and pronounced very

favourably of their juicy properties; but I could not conquer an aversion I conceived for them, when, digging for one I shot that fell into its hole, I found that a rattlesnake and a filthy prairie owl were its companions.

Our animals were regularly in clover this evening, the close pasture being ankle deep; but being thirsty, I suppose, from the salt licking, the moment we unharnessed them they ran off in a body to the river, and jumped in, soon sinking in the quicksand, and, in their floundering to extricate themselves, getting entangled in each other's ropes—the stronger plunging over the weaker, until, from utter exhaustion, they could struggle no longer. Several of them had only their heads over the water, and were at a very low ebb; indeed, when we durst venture to their relief, it was a great risk to do so; but, as our all depended on them, the hazard should be undertaken. Six of the party, therefore, went into the midst of them, cutting the ropes right and left; and such was their sagacity, knowing we came to their 104 aid, they never moved until we urged them. The uppermost ones managed to crawl out of their own accord when freed from the meshes; but we had to prop up and assist the others to the bank; and even when they got on firm ground they reeled and staggered from fright and feebleness. It was, unfortunately, necessary in our case to leave the lariats constantly on them, letting them trail when we set them loose, otherwise we would have infinite trouble in catching them, not being adepts at lassooing.

Although we had not a chip of wood this evening, we had a capital substitute in buffalo chip (as their ordure is called), which makes roaring fires, and is the exclusive fire of the Indian tribes who live in their haunts; but as it will only burn when dry, you will see all the squaws employed in carrying it into their wigwams, on the approach of a rainstorm laying in a sufficient store to carry them over to the period when it will be again baked dry by the sun.

We made an early start next morning, and soon came into a district where there was not a blade of grass, a mite of herbage—not in consequence of backward vegetation, but of buffalo appetite, for they cropped it down to the earth. We also found many other unerring proofs of their very recent presence in this quarter, in great quantities of their coating, sometimes in large flakes the size of a sheep's fleece, where they tumbled and wallowed. It was of a soft yet tough nature, such as I am

sure would make warm and most 105 enduring cloth or coarse hosiery. I afterwards saw with Mr. Husband, the manager at Fort Laramie, stockings knitted of that material, which were neat and comfortable, and in use without a fray nearly two years. We persevered in the delusive hope of finding grass, and were at length forced to stop at a lagoon, where young reeds were the only feed; but we endeavoured to compensate the animals for their short commons by an extra hour's nooning and a short afternoon's travel.

All morning as we came along we remarked, at a distance from the opposite bank of the river, a dark continuous line, that neither looked like timber nor broken ground; and as we stopped, fancying we observed some motion, I had recourse to the glass, by which I saw distinctly they were vast herds of buffalo, that, by the fresh tracks on our side, must have recently crossed over, after wasting the country around us. The enormous extent on which they stood made a guess at their numbers almost impossible. Two of our party, who were desirous to draw first blood, volunteered to go over, and made the necessary preparations, promising us hump-steaks and many other delicacies for supper, jumping in with great spirit and apparent determination; but they scarcely proceeded one hundred yards when their ardour seemed damped, for they kept looking back at the shore, as if in doubt about the prudence of proceeding, but ashamed to return, until at length a whirling eddy made them shy it altogether, returning 106 amidst taunts and laughter, which originated the first token of angry exasperation that exhibited itself since our start. I had very great difficulty in bringing about an amicable adjustment; however, when their anger began to subside, there was a strife towards reconciliation that was mutually sincere.

107

CHAPTER VII.

Shaved look of the Prairie—Speckled with Chip—Second Attempt at crossing—Successful, but attended with great Danger—Kill a Buffalo—Estimate of their Numbers—Prairie Wolves; their Sagacity—Narrow Escapes at Recrossing—“Misfortunes never come Single”—Crossing of the Buffalo—Flight of our Animals—Peculiarities of the Buffalo—Lie in wait for a Drove coming over the River—Shoot a Cow—Their Appearance at this Season—A November Robe the best—

Gregarious Propensities—Interfere with the Progress of the Mexican Army—Buffalo Break—Meet a small Herd on our Path—Wound one—Account of the Chase—Nervous Affair—Mode of Preserving the Meat—Extraordinary Thickness of the Buffalo Skull—Test it by Rifle Practice—Our Camp—Obliged to Drive our Stock on an Island—Rain saturates the Chip and leaves us without Fire—Grumbling and Dissatisfaction of the Men—Some wish to Return—Persuaded to wait till we reach Fort Laramie—Buffalo Milk—Another Prairie Dog Town—Cheerless Landscape; effects on the Spirits—Sagacity of the Mule—Miss some of our Men, who appear in the Morning greatly knocked up. SEEING the herbage so cropped, and the ground completely speckled with buffalo chip, I sent three horsemen forward to search for night quarters, and, after following five or six miles, I found one of them waiting at another marshy spot, where, he said, from appearances two miles ahead, he would advise us to wait until the other two men returned; as they intended going the full length, it would be possible we could reach with the waggons. We occupied ourselves, in the mean time, in watching the buffalo through the glass, which, though 108 we had travelled nine miles parallel with them, were one unbroken mass, even as far forward as we could see; the other men soon after returned with bad news, reporting the country, so far as they went (over eight miles), as totally devoid of feed, and still covered with chip. I therefore passed the word to unhitch, and, as our halt was two hours earlier than usual, giving us four hours until sunset, it afforded sufficient time, as I thought, to make another attempt at crossing. I now began to feel a twitch of ambition myself to make my début as a buffalo-hunter, one of the old party and two new recruits avowing their readiness to join in the essay; so we four took soil, stripping off everything but our shirts and shoes, the river being here considerably over a mile and a half wide, and very rapid. We got above our waists immediately near the shore, but, after wading fifteen or twenty yards, it began to shoal until we were not knee deep: the sand was very shifty, and the current rapid, making the footing very insecure and toilsome. A few yards more brought us again into deep water, and thus it kept alternating from an ankle ripple to a chin-deep surge, the water being so muddy we could not discover the difference of depth. We struggled on for half an hour without seeming to have made any palpable approximation to the opposite shore, our boots and shoes getting panged with sand and sharp gravel, crippled us very much, and caused such pain, we resolved on making an effort to get them off; but, as the shortest pause in the quicksand made us sink right down, it was a

matter of extreme difficulty, especially 109 with me, who was the only wearer of boots. I managed, however, to get one off, after some staggering; but in attempting to pull off the other I lost my balance, without fully effecting my purpose. The suddenness of the souse, and my endeavours to keep my rifle dry, gave me quite enough to do; and when I got upright, I found my foot stuck in the leg of my boot, yet I durst not stop to get it out, though it impeded my motions dreadfully; at this moment one of my companions got into an eddy, and losing his presence of mind, shouted lustily, letting go his rifle, which he did not recover. As I pressed forward to his assistance, I saw he drifted on to a shoal bar, where he again got to his legs, and was enabled to make a fresh start. After an hour and twenty minutes, wading and floundering, we at length reached *terra firma*, but so completely used up, we had to recruit for a quarter of an hour before we were up to the mark for attack; then, after fresh capping our rifles, we rose to our knees to survey the herd, which, to our great mortification, were much more distant than we imagined, standing on a level plain that did not admit of a covert approach in any direction. We had, however, a favourable wind, and not having much time to manoeuvre, we determined on going up in single file.

As we got fairly on our legs, absolute bewilderment got the better of our passion for the slaughter, for, as far as the eye could peer up and down, and inwards towards the bluffs, it was so closely covered with those animals that they had scarce room to feed, thousands of calves sporting before them. I asked my comrades, all highly 110 intelligent men, for an estimate of their numbers, which they set down at 100,000; but I conscientiously believe three times that amount would have been within the mark, for a well-digested guess at the number of square miles they occupied, allowing a reasonable number per acre, gives a result more than justifying my computation.

We moved briskly forward, gaining half the intervening space before they appeared to observe us. An old bull, who stood isolated in the front, was the first to alarm them, when he immediately commenced pawing the ground and bellowing, with several others following his example, until they raised a cloud of dust, under cover of which we advanced at a trot, getting within two hundred yards of the nearest, and simultaneously discharged our three rifles, at the report of which they broke, shaking the earth as they galloped away towards the bluffs. When the dust cleared away we saw one behind, sitting with its fore-legs propping up the body. Reloading leisurely, we gave her time

to bleed and become enfeebled, so as to be disabled from attacking us, which a wounded buffalo is certain to do, if capable of moving. As we drew nigh she struggled to her legs, bodly confronting us; but now, being inside fifty yards, I sent a ball into the fatal quarter, above the brisket, which brought her heavily to the ground. As our time was limited, we hastily cut out the tongue, and, without attempting to strip off the hide, cut off a few humpsteaks, for we could not carry a heavy load over the river.

111

The sun had nearly run its course as we began retracing our steps; nor had we gone far, when we saw a pack of prairie wolves in high repast on the carcase we had just left, for instinct teaches those animals to prowl about the flanks of large herds, whose sickly, aged, and wounded members fall to their lot in more than sufficient numbers to sustain them. It was nearly dusk ere we regained the bank of the river, and I felt half-disposed, even naked as we were, to remain on that side till morning, the more particularly as the river was higher than when we crossed—caused, as I subsequently learned, by the thaws near its source in the Rocky Mountains, which, alternating with the frost at night, causes a regular rise and fall each day. Second thoughts, however, made me resolve on the attempt, as the nipping evening air began to exercise its influence on our naked persons. We now fairly stripped, hanging our bundles on the end of our rifles; and I, being the tallest, went in advance, having arranged that we should wade one after another, within reach, so that we might render each other assistance in case of accident. It was nearly dark when I slid down the bank, and had not proceeded more than ten steps when I was swept off my feet, and compelled to strike out with one hand. I soon, however, got footing again, and called to the rest to try it higher up, where they got no deeper than their hips. Our progress was very slow, it being nervous work crossing such a river in the night; and one of our companions got so frightened, our difficulties were sadly enhanced. I made him throw away the meat which he 112 undertook to carry (being unencumbered with a gun, which he lost in the previous crossing), and endeavoured to cheer him and keep up his courage, for he was fast sinking from fear and exhaustion. Shortly afterwards he uttered a shrill scream, as he got whirled round in an eddy, where I heard him plashing quite close to me, but could not see him; however, I made a plunge in that direction, and caught him by the

leg, drawing him towards me, until I got him upright in my arms, when he convulsively clasped me in his, and locked his legs round me, so as to completely impede my motion. I thought for a moment our fate was inevitable; but it flashed on me that submersion was the only alternative to disengage him, so I threw myself forward, clasping his wrist. As I anticipated, the shock liberated me, and I arose, pulling him, more dead than alive, until one of the others came to my assistance, who grasped the other arm. Thus we struggled fully an hour towards a fire which our companions providentially lit as a beacon; and when we reached the shore there was not an individual of the four able to clamber up the bank without assistance. It was some time ere we could be well assured of S—n's recovery; however, warm blankets and hot brandy-punch eventually restored him, and the remembrance of his escape cured him of his passion for buffalo hunting.

We were doomed this evening to experience an exemplification of the proverb, “Misfortunes never come single,” for in the middle of the night a horde of the buffalo crossed close to our camp, looing and 113 bellowing, making the ground tremble as if under the paroxysm of an earthquake, and causing all our animals, without a single exception, to stampede. Every man, save six who were indispensable for guarding the waggons, had to turn out on foot in pursuit. Fortunately the night was clear, and though we could not overtake them, we could see the course they took up a ravine leading to the other side of the bluffs. It was dawning day when we reached the top, and though we could not see them, the fresh ordure gave us an idea of the direction they went, towards another range of hills, from which we saw them about five miles off, on the prairie. They did not attempt running further as we approached and secured the bell-mare, who had all her faithful mules around her; but nine of the horses were still wanting, so six of us mounted bare-backed, with nothing but the lariats; and after scouring the plains for two long hours, we found them all quietly grazing on a dip of land, where they waited quietly till we caught them; but by the time we all got back the day was so advanced we did not think of moving.

There was no necessity for again fording the river in pursuit of buffalo, there being droves both above and below us on our own side, and numbers in the act of crossing, giving us a good prospect of sport and fresh food. Those to leeward of us did not remain long contiguous, crossing over the bluffs in enormous batches, for it is an extraordinary peculiarity of the buffalo, that it will run from

the scent of a white man much sooner than from his person, while they are indifferent to that 114 of the Indian, though he is more frequently in collision with them; and their sense of smelling is so very acute, a pale-face has not a chance of getting near them, unless he goes right up the wind. We observed a large drove to windward, about midway over the river, and as the reeds along the banks were three feet high, concealment was conparatively easily; so I took with me three of our best marksmen and stole into ambush, taking a position where we supposed they should pass within one hundred yards of us; but in their passage they inclined so much down with the stream, it looked as if they would trample right over us; and as we were hesitating what we should do, a huge, ferocious-looking bull who headed the drove, ascended the bank within thirty yards of us, the rest following in a line, which they generally do when moving of their own accord, without apprehension. The string being long, we waited patiently till a fine cow (now in better season than the other sex) was passing, when two fired, and she fell without a struggle.

The shape and appearance of the buffalo is in nowise symmetrical or sightly at any season, but they now looked particularly ungainly, their coats being for the most part cast along their sides and quarters, their necks and heads alone retaining thier shaggy covering, most inappositely like a pet French poodle. In this month (May) they generally shed, and judges say that a November robe is the best, as the new fleece, having six months to grow, becomes in that period sufficiently thick and warm, with all that softness conducive to 115 comfort, whereas those that attain a full winter's growth become coarse, bristly, and matted. I read many accounts, and heard divers and sundry stories of the buffalo, and of their marvellous gregarious propensities, but I always swallowed such yarns “cum grano salis,” allowing what I conceived a liberal margin for the exercise of the long-bow which travellers generally use, as poets do their license. However, experience has now satisfied me that in those instances, at least, reality transcends imagination. I can thus profess my faith in previous writers, and reconcile my scepticism to the statement, that in the progress of the army of invasion over the Mexican plains, they were frequently obliged to fire grape-shot amongst them to open a way; for I should mention, that when once a herd of buffalo break (as it is termed), running off in the mass, they are not to be turned aside by common obstacles, but go right ahead, regardless of everything before them, fearing only the cause in their rear that originated their flight. They have

been frequently known to burst right through the line of a caravan, trampling the mules to death, and the waggons to pieces, the men escaping with difficulty.

We had not travelled many miles, after apportioning the cow, until we saw a small herd directly in our path, when we halted, and two of our men crept up to shoot at them. There was a gorge in the bluffs opposite where they were feeding, through which I knew they would rush in retreat when fired on, and there I posted myself on horseback with a light carabine that I could manage with one hand. I was not deceived, for they made 116 direct for the open when they broke, but my horse became so fretful and fidgety, I could not take aim as they passed. I gave chase, however, and soon got up to and alongside the headmost, down whose shoulder I saw a stream of blood, the effect of a wound. He cast his eyes fiercely round occasionally as I came over-close to him, showing a disposition to attack, so that it required both my hands in the bridle to prevent my horse from bolting. I persevered, nevertheless, running a neck-and-neck race, leaping over rocks and bursting through copses of thick brush, until we came to a dry gully that crossed our path, over twelve feet deep, and as many yards wide, and as in mid-career it was impossible to stop short, down we leaped, landing amidst those brutes, who, jostling each other in the descent, were tumbled at the bottom. It was a fearful moment, and I thought it all up with me, as my horse came to his chest by the shock; but, ere he was on his legs, I was again alone with my bleeding companion, who was scrambling up the other bank; I, however, gained the level first, and before he could get into active motion, fired, but, not being over six yards from him, he made an instant rush, and gored my very poor horse in the shoulder, coming against him with such force as to throw him clean over, unseating me with extreme violence, and falling himself to his knees in the exertion. The horse jumped quickly up and ran away at full speed, with my foot sticking in the stirrup, and the wounded bull in pursuit; a sudden jerk at length caused the boot to pull off, the bull with his impetus overrunning me, and 117 in attempting to stop falling heavily, and lying unable to rise from loss of blood and exhaustion, while I lay at a little distance incapable of moving, from the stunning effects of my accident. Seeing my horse gallop back without its rider, several of the men hurried up the ravine, and found me just recovering from a faint. After washing off the blood and giving me a drink, they proceeded to despatch the buffalo, who had not yet yielded up the ghost, for, as they

discharged their pistols at him, he made several desperate efforts to rise, glaring fiercely at them, and uttering a low bellowing roar, not so much of pain, I should say, as madness. He was a very large beast, and loaded the saddle-horses well in bringing him piecemeal to the waggons.

Having now two beeves—much more than we could consume until the flesh would become tainted—I thought it advisable to remain where we were, and preserve the meat. This is managed on the prairie by cutting it into strips and drying it over a fire on a kiln, constructed of poles and wattles, when it will keep sweet for a length of time. The Indians manage it by the heat of the sun, but we called in the aid of artificial fire to ensure despatch. All meat is the better of being kept over some days before use, but I never before met any that tendered so quickly as the buffalo; whether from its feeding or rambling habits of life I cannot say. We had some steaks on the coals in less than two hours after the slaughter, yet it eat as short and tender as if kept in a meat-safe for a week under the auspices of the most professed epicure. We feasted like aldermen on 118 boiled tongue, hump-steak, and marrow-bones, and during the evening had some target practice at the head of the bull (which I often heard was impenetrable to a rifle-bullet), commencing at three hundred yards, and reducing the distance to one hundred, at which short range it was perfectly ball-proof. It is not the great thickness of the *os frontis* alone that offers the resistance; the shaggy mass of hair and wool with which the head is covered first arrests the ball, particularly the rifle-ball, which, in its spiral motion, twists it into wad and deadens the concussion against the bone.

My horse bled profusely, and suffered cruelly from the musquitoes, who gathered on the long wound in multitudes. He was unfit for use afterwards till we reached Fort Laramie, and I experienced myself great pain and uneasiness from the dreadful bumping I got as he dragged me along.

We were early on the road next morning, the travelling easy, but the grass, as the Yankee barbers say, “was shaved behind the skin.” The bluffs gradually inclining to the river, and diminishing the width of the plain, we did not stop to noon, pushing ahead till our avant courier returned with the disagreeable intelligence that there was no feed ahead for ten miles; we then immediately diverged for the margin of the river, where alone there was a particle to be met; but opposite our camp there

was a low island, about five hundred yards from the shore, that, from its green appearance, tempted me, notwithstanding my former essay at Platte fording, to visit it. In this I succeeded pretty easy, not 119 being encumbered with anything whatsoever, finding, to my great gratification, abundance of grass that escaped the over-ravenous maw of the buffalo. I shouted back the glad tidings, desiring them to send over the animals, who, for the first time, evinced a hesitation to follow the bell-mare. It was dark before the last was got over, the rain falling in torrents, and not a stick or atom to light a fire, the buffalo chip being rendered unfit for ignition too; so we had to sit down wet and weary, to a cheerless supper of raw bacon and hard ship bread.

This was the first time I saw the spirit of any of our party beginning to flag, and as we sat shivering to our comfortless meal, three of them openly expressed their desire to return home. I sought to joke them out of their whim, but it was no use. They demanded a waggon, with their proportion of the animals and provision; which, as I told them, I had no power to give, it being a matter for the consideration of the company, who were unanimous in their refusal, as it would weaken our strength, and expose them to certain peril, in returning through the Pawnee nation after what had occurred. This latter argument had some weight with the dissentients, who I endeavoured to comfort with the assurance that, when we reached Laramie, I would do what I could to have their wishes complied with, as they might probably hit there upon a caravan going with skins and furs to the States.

If we had a bad supper, we had a treat for breakfast next morning in some rich buffalo-milk, one of the last 120 watch having shot a cow whose udder was full of milk, which he took from her before she cooled; he also got the calf, but it was poor and weakly; I should suppose from the constant roaming. We passed through several dog villages in the course of the day, one of which, by its vast extent, I set down as the metropolis of the canine nation, and shot a good many, several of the party preferring them even to buffalo beef. The ravages of those little animals gave the plains a sterile look, which, together with the naked aspect of the sandy river, now completely devoid of timber, and dotted with low sedgy islets, presented a most cheerless and desolate landscape, that was not without its depressing effects on the spirits and feelings. We kept travelling later than usual, cherishing the hope of finding grass, but evening came without our meeting any. The mules—nor

was it to be wondered at—showed signs of uneasiness, and commenced braying unanimously, as if in remonstrance against any further advance. Subsequently I frequently tried, and noticed both at noon and evening, as the customary hour passed, an occasional bray was given to jog our memory, and give us to understand it was time to stop.

We had an accumulation of annoyances this evening, for when we came to camp there were three of our men missing, and the rain came down in such a deluge, no one felt disposed to go out and look for them. Their absence would not have caused me so much uneasiness, only that, having the river to guide them, I thought it next to impossible they could have gone astray, which 121 suggested the idea of their having fallen in with the war party of the Sioux, to whom the guns would have been a great prize. I was so haunted with this apprehension I could not sleep, and about midnight I sallied forth with a bugle, which I kept sounding, after a fashion, without any other effect than that of bringing about me a pack of night-walking wolves. At daybreak there was still no tidings, so I ordered twelve men to make ready, and return to where they were last seen, then to divide into parties of four, and make a strict search. Each horseman packed two days' provisions, as they were not to return the first night if unsuccessful, nor were the waggons to move though the feed was so bad. But as everything was in readiness, and some of the men actually in their saddle, some dark objects were seen in the distance, who we joyfully recognised through the glass to be our missing friends, and in order to expedite their arrival, I sent off three men, with led horses, to meet them. They said they wounded an antelope, which they followed up a great distance; and in their anxiety to bring some of the flesh to camp, overloaded themselves, and were caught by night before they could gain the river, which they vainly endeavoured to grope out in the dark, and at length lay down on the bare ground, under the heavy rain. They were very much fatigued, two of them complaining of sore throat and headache.

122

CHAPTER VIII.

Beds for the Invalids—Mode of decoying Antelope—Try it, and Succeed—Sleetstorm—Soft State of the Ground—Cannot find a Dry Spot to Camp on—A Lot of Mules get badly Mired

—Continuance of the Storm—Dread lest the River should rise—The Indian Dreader alarmed again—Visit of a large Party of Sioux Indians—Handsome Caparisons—Reason of our Friend's Precipitate Return—Description of the Sioux—Their Costume—Mode of betokening Friendship —Exhibit our Trading Wares—Interchange of Presents—They leave, promising to meet us at the Ford in the Morning—Do not meet their War Party—Mode of Indian Burial—Find the Ford too deep for Crossing—Try it, but are forced to desist—Washing on the Plains—Sioux come again in a handsome Cavalcade—Beauty and Fascinations of the Sioux Women—Sioux Cleverness at Trading—Visit their Village by Invitation—Description of their Town and Wigwams—Juvenile Archery—Get a Cure for my Horse—Give an Acknowledgment of our kind Reception—Take our reluctant Leave—False Character given of the Sioux—River Falls—Wound an Indian by Mistake —Great Breadth of the Platte—The task of Crossing—Consolation in a Hailstorm—Try our New Buffalo Horse—Description of the Indian style of hunting that Animal—Nervous Passage over a very Narrow Ridge—Dangerous Descent and Accident—Lovely Basin at the Bottom—Whirlwind —Enormous sized Hailstones—“Ash Hollow,” “North Platte.”

I GOT beds made for the invalids in the waggons, and made a start in a biting north-east wind, that called for all the muffling we could muster. Our road lay through sandhills, which made the pulling very severe. About ten o'clock, like the shifting of a scene, the cold and gloom moved off, and the piercing air was supplanted by a scorching sun. We frequently before experienced sudden transitions, but this was by much 123 the quickest, reminding me of Æsop's “Contest betwixt the Wind and the Sun” in its effect on our change of garments. Such variable weather might be supposed to be conducive to bad health, but, with the exception of the broken-down antelope-hunters, there were none of our party ailing.

We saw a very large herd of antelope a good way off, at the base of the bluffs, who kept such a sharp look-out there was no getting close to them; but having heard, from a superannuated trapper at Independence, that by affixing a bright-coloured rag to a pole, and sticking it in the ground near you, it would be certain to attract them within pistol-range, if the person in ambush could thoroughly conceal himself, I took this opportunity of testing the efficacy of the stratagem. Getting a capital hiding-place in a dry gully, in the bank of which I stuck up a gaudy-coloured kerchief, they

soon saw the novel object fluttering in the breeze, when they all gathered into a bunch, confronting it, gazing at it with elevated heads, like a flock of sheep when a strange dog crosses their pasture, and approximating at intervals, until they came within fifty yards of it, stamping the ground with their fore-feet, as it waved to and fro, as if they were angrily puzzled to make it out. I was so amused, peeping at them, I did not fire until they came almost within “blow” of me, and I then shot two, the ball going slick through one and killing another as well. The result of this experiment made me attach greater credence for the future to the stories of old trappers, 124 which I previously regarded as the gossiping yarns of whimsical dotards. I was told in the States that the flesh of the antelope was, as the Yankees termed it, “mean stuff;” but I cannot coincide in this verdict, for the steak we had this evening was as well-flavoured and juicy as any I could desire. In the afternoon we saw several scattered herds of buffalo grazing amidst the sandhills; but, as we had an abundant supply of fresh provisions, we did not molest them.

Firewood was now our most urgent want, for there was not as much timber on our line of march as would make a toothpick, the interminable Platte winding along the bare plains like a monstrous serpent, without grass, flowers, or any object to relieve the plodding tedium of our way. The chip was not dry enough for culinary purposes, but the staves of a small rice cask which we found out afforded sufficient fuel to dress our evening's meal. Next morning was ushered in with a storm of rain and hail, drifted by a strong cold wind, its “pitiless pelting” driving the animals before it with their tails tucked in betwixt their legs; and though they went at a sneaking pace they were a long way off before breakfast was over. There was no great difficulty in overtaking them, but the job was to make them face it; for no sooner would we have them headed towards the camp than a violent squall would make them round their sterns to it again, so that it took us four hours to get them back half that number of miles.

From all appearances it had set in for a constant wet day, the gushing torrents making me uneasy lest the 125 river should rise and prevent our crossing. The travel was so deep, the wheels were working half the time up to the naves, the poor mules sinking at every step above the fetlocks, so that humanity forbade our persevering beyond a half day's drive. The country was so very flat, the surface water gave it the appearance of a lake, rendering it difficult to get enough of high land to

answer for camping on. As soon as the animals were set free they cantered off to a greenish patch that looked like grass, but which was only a thin coating over a slough, in which eleven of them got mired so badly, the probability of relieving them looked very questionable indeed. After trying several expedients without success, we got each of them bound round with strong ropes, attaching a swingle-tree to a long chain that reached the firm ground, and then harnessed a team of eight mules, by which means we hauled them out one by one, five of them getting badly lacerated by the ropes and tyings. The worst of it was, all our hard jobs occurred in heavy rain and storm, debarring us of the comforts of a fire for warmth or cooking. When they were over this evening the men suffered so much I served out, for the first time, small rations of brandy in lieu of coffee.

There was not a moment's intermission all night, nor a sign of abatement in the morning. Some of the men went to the river to look for drift brush, but did not get a particle; our breakfast, therefore, consisted of raw beef or bacon, hard bread, and water,—rather meagre fare, taken into consideration with our other hardships 126 and privations. We now appeared rather to be travelling by water than over land, so completely was the low level ground submerged by the rain, which made me, at all hazards, determine to try and reach the ford of the Platte that evening, for if the storm happened to be general—which it appeared to be—the river might get so swollen as to detain us for a week. In order to put the animals in heart, I gave each a large basin of thick gruel made of corn meal, which they licked up with great relish, and paid for in improved exertions. After a few hours' travel the plains began to rise and the clouds to break, leaving us by noon once more dry land and a comfortable sun. I then sent a small party ahead to inspect and report on the state of the ford, which I knew could not be far away, our Indian dreader amongst them, who since the late “affair assumed a valour if he had it not,” deriding the bare idea of Indian prowess when opposed to that of a white man. But rather sooner than I expected the desired intelligence I descried a horseman returning in hot haste, who I soon perceived was our friend, bareheaded, with a pistol in each hand, the bridle-reins broken and hanging down. Thus the horse, being under no restraint, galloped into the midst of the loose animals, who, wondering what was the matter, commenced braying, kicking, prancing, and wheeling about him, getting up a most ludicrous scene, in which our friend appeared to be enacting the classic part of “fool in the middle.” Before I could ascertain the cause of his

sudden retreat, I saw the remainder of the party 127 returning, surrounded by a cavalcade of about five hundred Sioux Indians, accompanied with a number of young squaws, all superbly mounted, and their horses caparisoned in a curious but highly ornamental style, the head-stalls, rosettes, and nosebands of the bridles fringed with a light trimming of red cloth, and the saddle-cloths, which extended over the quarters and down the sides of their fine-spirited animals, elaborately worked with particoloured beads, and bunchy variegated tassels dangling at the corners. This fully accounted for our friend's precipitate return, who, when he took breath and got hold of the reins, with a badly simulated composure stated he hurried back to be the first to announce the finding of the ford; but, like Dr. O'toole when questioned about the keys, he feigned to be altogether oblivious of the circumstance of having the pistols in his hands; an exhibition rather unusual in the proclamation of pleasing intelligence.

I never, either in civilised or savage life, saw a finer or nobler looking race of men than the Sioux, who now favoured us with a visit, all of them of great stature, stalwart, muscular proportions, and agile to a degree, with highly intelligent countenances, strikingly handsome features, and a complexion very little deeper than a dark olive. They were well armed with various weapons—guns, pistols, tomahawks, bows and arrows—their clean, glossy, and ample buffalo robes hanging about them with all the effect of a Roman toga. The women were extremely beautiful, with finely-chiselled features, dark lustrous eyes, raven locks, and pearly 128 teeth, which they disclosed in gracious smiles, that lit up their lovely faces with a most bewitching radiance. They wore no head-dress, their luxuriant tresses, divided with the most scrupulous accuracy, flowing in unconfined freedom over their shoulders. Their attire consisted of a tanned buckskin bodice, not over tight, fitting after the Nora Creena fashion, to which was appended a short full skirt of the same material that did not quite reach the knees. The legs were concealed by close leathern hose, that revealed the most exquisite symmetry, embroidered on the sides with beads, meeting above the taper ankles a laced mocassin, worked up the instep in the same manner; and over all was thrown, with a most graceful negligence, a light blanket of snowy whiteness, so arranged as to form a hood in an instant. They also wore large eardrops, and had the fingers up to the joints covered with rings.

As the men approached they dismounted, proffering their hands, with good-humour beaming in their countenances. The women did not offer any salutation; but at a signal from the chief—a man of herculean proportions, of the real Paddy Cary family, “with brawny shoulders five feet square”—they, too, dismounted, and after tethering their horses, squatted in a semicircle at a little distance from the men. The chief, then, with a great air of ceremony, commenced charging a large pipe—the calumet of peace—which he passed amongst his subjects, each taking a whiff, and giving his chest a thump as he concluded. It was then handed 129 to us to do likewise, being, I understand, the most reliable token of friendliness they can give. As soon as this ordeal was concluded, we gave them to know we were disposed to trade in blankets, tobacco, and ornaments, and of which we had a large stock, for horses robes and mocassins; an intimation that set them all a chattering briskly, during which we unfolded our wares with the assiduity of practised pedlars, exhibiting them to the inspection of the ladies, who seemed highly pleased with them, as we pointed out their different excellences, holding up our paste baubles in the sun's rays, and showing them the reflection of their sweet countenances in little pocket mirrors, as an inducement to deal; and further propitiating their good opinion by making them a few small presents of beads and rings. There was one dear girl amongst the group I was fairly smitten with, to whom I presented a small looking-glass, taking leave to kiss the tips of her delicate fingers as she graciously accepted it; at which she smiled, as if understanding this silent but expressive mode of admiration, and taking off a ring, caught hold of my hand to put it on—an operation I playfully protracted by cramping my fingers, that I might prolong the pleasure of contact with so charming a creature. The men now made signs they would meet us at the ford in the morning with the articles they had for exchange, and then giving the signal to mount, sprung into their saddles, and galloped off to their village with the squaws in advance.

Before leaving us, they inquired if we met their war party, appearing greatly astonished and disappointed as 130 we answered in the negative; and now that I had proofs of the kindliness and amicable disposition of their brethren, I regretted it much, as it is a spectacle of surpassing interest and novelty; thus described by Mr. Bryant, who was fortunate enough to have witnessed one: “I had not travelled this morning far, when I met the war party of the Sioux Indians, who had just broken

up their camp, and started on an expedition against the Crows. Their first design was to conduct their women and children to a secure point on the Platte, where they intended to leave them in care of the old men till they returned. In marching, they seemed to be divided into numerous parties, at the head of each of which was a beautiful young female, gorgeously decorated, mounted on a fat prancing Indian horse, and bearing in her hand a delicate pole or staff, about ten feet long, from the point of which was suspended, in some instances, a gilt ball and a variety of brass trinkets, with brilliant feathers and natural flowers of various colours. The chiefs, dressed in their richest costumes, followed immediately in the rear of the female ensign-bearer, with their bows and arrows in their hands; next succeeding them were the women and children and pack animals belonging to the party; and in the rear of all, the warriors; the whole as I met them, party after party, was a most interesting display of savage pageantry. The female standard-bearers appeared to be more fascinating and beautiful than any objects connected with savage life which I had ever read of or conceived; it appeared as if this was a solemn occasion, for not one of 131 those composing the long column, some three or four miles in length, as I passed them, seemed to recognise any object or utter any sound; they marched at a slow pace, in perfect silence, with their eyes gazing steadfastly on vacancy in front. I bowed many times, but they took no notice of my salutations. Doubtless their stern deportment was expressive of their determination not to look to the right or left until they had penetrated into the country, and wreaked their vengeance on their enemies, the Snakes and Crows." Very soon after our visitors departed we came to a stop in a slope, on which there was some better pasture, about four miles short of the ford, as the mules do not like going into the water in a cold collar, and within that distance they would have their blood sufficiently warmed.

There were a few straggling trees along the river edge, in one of which there was a large round object that looked like a bird's-nest, but as eagles do not build in trees, and the dimensions of the object was too large for such a nest, I went down with a few others, and found a large circular bundle, the size of a washing-tub, wrapped up in matting, and tied with strips of tough bark. We could not make out or conjecture the meaning of this strange package till next day, when I was informed by a Sioux it was the body of a renowned warrior, interred in mid-air, lest the

wolves should scoop it up and devour it—a practice generally adopted towards those who have distinguished themselves either as warriors or wise men in the second degree.

The sun and we rose simultaneously, his smiles 132 setting us all asmiling as we good-humouredly pressed forward to encounter the current of the turbid Platte; but our gladsome gaiety was soon converted into growling, and "curses, not loud but deep," at finding its waters several feet above the usual level, and its flood proportionately increased in rapidity. I felt myself rather out of sorts with the first fine travelling day we had had for a week, and resolved in an attempt before abandoning it; so, selecting the tallest mule of the lot, I got on him without a saddle. Having divested myself of the major part of my clothing, the old boy, who was called Sacramento, from having figured in that battle, although a veteran campaigner, and equally at home on land or in water, evinced a great deal of reluctance in this instance about wetting his hide, discovering, I believe, in his sagacity, the impracticability of the attempt. However, I overpersuaded him, and very soon solved the question of fording, for within three lengths of the shore he was swept off his legs, and we were carried down a couple of hundred yards before we could regain it. There was nothing now for it but a little philosophy, vulgarly called patience; so, taking advantage of the pause, we commenced a general lavabo, to get rid of a large arrear of used-up garments, on which we rung the changes more than once, merely subjecting them to the elementary process of washing, by hanging them round the waggon tops, exposed to the influences of the rain and sun. On that occasion, however, we went somewhat more artistically to work with soap and knuckles, some of the wayfaring dandies being guilty of the excusable 133 plagiary, if I can call it so, of mangling, after the manner it is related the Bedouin Arab cooks his steak, by placing it between his posterior and the saddle, and setting his horse to full speed.

While hard at work, up to elbows in suds, our Sioux friends with a large accession of their tribe, made their appearance, coming over the rise driving a lot of mules and horses before them, and accompanied by a multitude of dogs, drawing packs on long poles.* They were, if possible, more carefully attired than on yesterday, and greeted us with the frankness and bonhomie of old acquaintances. The riding animals were all picketed apart, and those for trade, as well as the

robes and mocassins, placed within a space, surrounded by a ring of squatters. Before the traffic commenced, all those who received presents the day before stood forward to make theirs in return, which they did, especially the maidens, with a degree of simple, easy dignity and grace that was perfectly fascinating; and as the “nut-brown maid,” the charming recipient of my looking-glass, presented me with a richly-embroidered pair of mocassins, and proceeded to fasten a handsome bracelet of beads upon my wrist, I never remember to have been so rapturously impressed with the influences and 134 fascinations of lovely woman, making me forgive the river, even should it detain us for a week—a month—I had almost written, for ever. This over, the pipe was again lit and passed; a compliment we reciprocated by distributing a déjeûné of raw bacon and biscuit, which seemed to gratify them exceedingly. The traffic then commenced with great activity, and, unsophisticated though the Siouxs are by nature and habit, they displayed a quickness of discernment, and adroitness of dealing, that would have done credit to a Cheapside apprentice. They saw at a glance where your choice lay, and regulated their estimate accordingly; while in selecting the articles they desiderated, they affected a depreciative indifference, as if there was nothing in the batch that exactly suited them. The fair closed with our having got three tip-top mules, a trained buffalo-horse, some fine robes, and a pile of mocassins, for three muskets, six pairs of blankets, with a proportion of powder, lead, tobacco, and paint.

The vehicle is formed by attaching two poles to a breast-strap and passing them through the loops of a backband, letting the ends trail on the ground; binders are then stretched and secured behind the animal, and two upright sticks affixed, which prevent the load from slipping back. Large-sized ones are constructed of lodge poles (with which their houses are erected), and drawn by mules, by which two modes they transport all their effects when they change their villages, either for the convenience of fresh pasture, or to get into the neighbourhood of game.

We were then invited over to their village, five miles distant; an invitation we could not refuse without having it construed into an affront. I therefore took with me ten of our party, riding alongside my Dulcinea on her prancing palfrey, and as we went capering and curveting over the prairie, I flatter myself we formed an equestrian cortége that neither Ducrow nor Batty ever equalled—one that would monopolise admiration even in the classic regions of Rotten-row. About midway between our camp and the village there was a large wigwam, the same as those they live in, standing 135 isolated on the plain, in which the remains of their late chief were laid in state; it

was entirely closed up, and guarded vigilantly, to prevent its being disturbed until decomposition would completely denude the bones. We found the village standing on about twenty acres of land —a perfect circle—in the centre of which stood the residence of the present chief, surmounted with a flag made up of all colours in the rainbow. His lady was at home, but his three sons were along with the war party. Their wigwams are of a perfectly conical shape, about eighteen feet high, and twelve in diameter at the bottom. The skeleton of this primitive habitation is formed by a number of straight light spars, called lodge poles, tied closely together at the top, and spread out at the base so as to form a cone; they are then covered with tanned buffalo robes laced together, with a small aperture at the apex to let out the smoke, and a doorway at the side, which is closed by a flap looped up above it; the fire stands in the centre of the floor, and the mats and couches are ranged close along the sides. They are very superior to the general run of Indian habitations, and make a very comfortable dwelling, capable of being erected or taken down in a very short time.

We partook of some jerked beef in the chief's residence, and afterwards had a display of juvenile archery from the pappooses, or young children, who hit their marks with amazing precision. This was followed by a native dance by the young men and women, who chanted their own music, which was not of the most spirit-moving character; nor was the ballet a display of 136 a very attractive nature—as, indeed, it could not well be—for dancing in a circle, with clasped hands, did not admit of much grace or variety of motion. There seemed to be at least some half-dozen dogs to each wigwam, some of them fine-sized, powerful brutes, and the plains around for miles were covered with horses, mules, mares, and foals. I got a salve for my poor horse's shoulder from the chief, that soon healed it up, which, from its highly sanative properties, would be a great acquisition to the veterinary pharmacopœia, but I could not find out more than that it was composed of certain herbs and buffalo-marrow. Before leaving, the chief asked, and got from me, a written acknowledgment that he was a “good Indian,” and “treated us kindly,” which he would show to the commandant at Fort Kearney, to propitiate his good opinion. He then escorted us to the entrance of the village, and formally took leave, making us signs he would send some of his subjects in the morning to assist at the crossing. I turned more than once on the plain to gaze on the dwelling-place of the lovely Sioux girl; and, as the village sunk from sight beyond an undulation of the prairie, I felt a saddened soul

swelling, in which the moistened eye sympathised, and thought of the plaintive couplet: Maid of Athens, ere we part, Give, oh! give me back my heart.

I was told at the fort the Sioux were not to be trusted; that they were treacherous, thieving, and only contented when dabbling in human gore; yet I found their disposition the diametrically opposite to this 137 wholesale misrepresentation, and resolved for the future to harbour a different opinion of Indian character—at least where I found the females beautiful—for I think it will hold good, as a general rule, to expect more benignity of nature where the race is within the influence of the loveliness and gentleness of woman.

I was highly gratified to find on my return to camp that the river had fallen considerably, and that we might look for a steady decline from the continuance of fine weather. Those who remained in camp had not been idle in our absence, having propped up the waggonbeds fourteen inches on the axles; arranged the loading, by placing the powder and breadstuffs on the top; and having dug away the bank, made the descent easy and gradual, so that nothing remained but harness and dash in in the morning. An unpleasant accident took place in the night by the coming of the Indians the chief promised, who were not expected until morning; but long before the dawn they were seen advancing to the camp by one of the watch who remained behind, and was unaware of the arrangement. He at once challenged, and a second time, without receiving an answer, when he fired, sending the ball betwixt the left arm and the side of one of the Indians; fortunately without doing any injury—scarcely even drawing blood, as there was only a slight abrasion of the skin on both arm and side. The Indians walked coolly on as if nothing had occurred, and seemed to understand and cordially receive the explanation given them.

After an early and hurried breakfast two of the 138 Indians went into the river, and betwixt swimming and wading got over, after nearly an hour's struggle, the river being close upon two miles wide. When they reached the banks opposite, they took their stations at the point where alone we could get out; and one of those that remained mounted to point out the best track through the current. We then put five span of picked mules to my waggon, with a rider on the near leader and wheel ones, riding myself below the team, to prevent them from swerving with the stream. In this

order we went in, but, notwithstanding the digging away of the bank, the waggon made a dive that nearly drove the tongue mules under water; and, only there was a good man in the saddle, who upheld them with a powerful arm, the consequences might have been highly disastrous, as the waggon was broadside to the current. It occasionally swayed with portentous violence, almost floating when it got into deep water; and again, as it reached a shoal, the flood rushed through the spokes with a truly nervous noise. The mules in like manner were alternately aswim and walking, the length of our team constituting our greatest safety; for when the wheel mules would be out of their depth, the lead and middle ones might not be over knee-deep, and *vice versâ*, so that there were always some on the strain to keep the waggon in motion, otherwise it would sink in the quicksand, and all would be lost. The danger, against which it was impossible to take any precaution, was that of overturning, as the wheels on one side got on the steep sides of the countless hills and 139 bars of sand formed by the different eddies. Twice it was fairly poised, and I held my breath in an ecstasy of fear, thinking an upset inevitable, which would not only involve the loss of the waggon and its contents, but that of the mules, and very probably the riders, tangled in the harness as they necessarily should be. After fifty minutes' hard tugging the leaders reached land, and while climbing the bank exhibited symptoms of great exhaustion, as their sides sobbed with distress; but the nature of the bottom forbade a respite, so, dashing my riding-horse past them, as a mode of encouragement, all joining in a teamster's chorus, they charged the obstacle, and brought up their load right merrily, for over half-way, when overtasked nature, unable to sustain the impulse, let the motion diminish ominously until the wheels could be scarce seen to move; an instant's pause, and back it should inevitably go. At this critical moment the lead mules just gained the level ground, and in the next the victory was barely won, as up came the waggon, amidst our hoarse cheers; but our exultation was checked by the recollection that there were still four others to get over. Before they started, however, I got the bank on the coming out side graduated to an easy slope, which, together with lightening the loads, by packing all the tall horses and mules, enabled them to effect it with comparative ease, the only accident that occurred being the falling of a pack-horse, who lost his pack, and nearly smothered the man who was leading him.

As I before remarked, all our tasks either commenced 140 or ended in rain; which, in this instance, before we could pitch our tents, came down as if the flood-gates of heaven were swept off their hinges, and not a spark of fire to cheer or warm us. We had, however, this countervailing consolation to make us amends, that one of the greatest difficulties of the trip was vanquished in the passage of the Platte; there was, besides, plenty of first-rate feed for the game animals, who earned it well.

The 20th brought forth a sun, but of a cold, silvery complexion, little calculated to make the amende for the negligence of yesterday. With a toilsome day's work before us—having to cross the neck of land that separates the south from the north fork of Platte, the route lying over high hills and low valleys, that looked like lakes from the late rains—two of the Indians asked permission to accompany us “two suns' travel,” a request they could not be graciously denied, after the kind manner in which we were treated by their tribe. Not very long after starting we saw a small herd of buffalo to windward of us, and, being desirous to test the merits of the Buffalo horse we got in trade, I made known to one of the Indians that I wished him to pursue them and shoot one. Spreading out the arms before him that he might take his choice of weapons, he selected two holster-pistols, which he stuck in his girdle, and, throwing aside his robe, caught the little horse, and, making a sort of noose bridle of the lariat, jumped upon him bare-backed. The game creature knew perfectly well what was in the wind, as, pricking forward his ears, he voluntarily darted off towards the herd, while we stopped 141 on a hill-side looking on at the sport. It so happened the herd did not break until he was tolerably close to them, and, curiously enough, they then headed back in the direction from which he came. He was soon laid alongside a big bull, who, as he drew closer upon him, pistol in hand, made a quick lunge, which was as quickly evaded by the horse, without any admonition from the rider, immediately resuming his proximate position of his own accord. After galloping a few strides more, the Indian leant over, and stretching his arm to the full length, fired; a momentary shock followed the report, after which the wounded brute darted from the herd at his enemy; but the watchful horse, as quick as thought, wheeled right round, galloping away from his pursuer, with what jockies call a stirrup eye cast back to watch his movements, regulating his speed so accurately as not more than safely to outstrip him. The bleeding buffalo

continued the chase a quarter of a mile, and then stopped, pawing the earth in an agony of pain and fury; the horse was stock-still at the same moment, as if gifted with volition, and became again the pursuer, as the buffalo turned to rejoin the herd. In less than a minute he was once more side by side with the sinking bull, dodging his thrusts with the skill of a fencing-master, until another shot brought the contest to a close, the buffalo dropping to his knees and falling slowly over on his side as the life-ebbing tide issued from his chest. The Indian immediately dismounted to cut his throat; and, while engaged in this operation, the horse stood quietly over the prostrate carcase, like a greyhound after having 142 run down a hare. The instinct of those animals is truly surprising. They leave your hands free for the use of your weapons, requiring no guidance from the reins, for they intuitively hit upon the beast you select, watch their opportunities of approximating, and, anticipating his attack by the rolling of the eye, never fail in evading them. We subsequently killed all our buffalo from the back of this horse, who was also pleasant to ride, and steady as a pack animal.

About half-way between the forks we got upon the summit of the hills that divide them, where driving became rather a nerve-testing operation, the only practicable path being along a ridge, with a declivity, amounting to a precipice, on each side, and so narrow it did not admit of a man's walking alongside to lay hold of the leaders in case of need; but this very circumstance, I believe, contributed to our safety, as the sagacity of the mule convinced him there was no alternative but to go on cautiously. Not a voice was heard for a couple of miles, every mind being occupied with the sensations of impending danger; for in some places the trail was so edge-like, even some of the horsemen alit, under the influence of giddiness. As we advanced the ridge gradually rounded, leading to such a long and abrupt descent, that we debated the propriety of detaching the bodies of the waggons from the wheels and sliding them down; but as the driver of the lead one volunteered to essay a trial with rough double-locking and holding back with ropes, we tried the experiment, taking out all but the wheel-spans, which were left in 143 merely to guide, and succeeded admirably until the last, in the descent of which the frayed rope parted, and the waggon slid, or, more properly speaking, fell, on top of the mules, upsetting and killing the one on the off-side and breaking the collar-bone of the teamster, who was otherwise badly bruised; the bows were all smashed, and the

contents sent hopping down the steep. The waggon miraculously escaped any disabling fracture, enabling us to reload it and proceed without much delay. Two more moderate descents brought us into a lovely wooded dell, so watered and sheltered that vegetation of every description appeared as if stimulated by a hot-house compared with that on the open prairie. The modest wild rose, forgetting its coyness in the leafy arbours, opened out its velvet bosom, adding its fragrant bouquet to that of the various scented flowers and shrubs which form the underwood of the majestic ash, that confer a name upon the spot, producing a perfectly aromatic atmosphere. Cool streams, filtered through the adjoining hills, prattled about, until they merged their murmurs in a translucent pond, reposing in the centre of a verdant meadow, a perfect parterre, whose bespangled carpet looked the congenial area for the toys and gambols of the light-tripping beings of fairy-land.

While contemplating the beauties of this favoured place, one of the Indians ran up, shouting unintelligible jargon at the top of his voice, and gesticulating with frantic vehemence. Hostile Indians first suggested themselves as the cause of the alarm; then a wild drove 144 of hemmed-in buffalo; but the practised eye of the Sioux detected a gathering whirlwind, peculiar to those regions, and eagerly pointing to the south-west, where a small black cloud, that did not look bigger than a connon-ball, came rushing and expanding through the sky with preternatural velocity. He made hasty signs to unhitch the mules, and bring them, with ourselves, to shelter in a thick brush, apart from any lofty timber; but before they were all disengaged the roar of the maddened elements burst upon us with appalling violence, projecting hail and irregular blocks of ice, of unprecedented magnitude, that plumped through the exposed waggon-covers as if they were wet paper, and made the animals wince and jump as they hopped upon their backs and quarters. Several huge trees were uprooted near where we first halted, and limbs and branches whirled aloft like so many wisps. It swept past us in a very few minutes, taking the course of the ridge from which we so lately descended; and had it overtaken us there, it would have put an end to the expedition, for men, animals, and waggons, would have been inevitably hurled from the heights. As we crept from our shelter, we found the ground covered with detached masses of ice, some of which measured six, some nine inches in circumference, many glittering with prismatic hues, which, on being broken, had blades of grass in their hearts, that were carried into the air by the whirlwind, and congealed

in their frozen prisons. I am satisfied that many of those pieces were sufficiently heavy to cause death if they hit a person 145 on a slightly-covered head. Our waggons presented a most tattered appearance, and left us a busy evening's patchwork. We now emerged from the narrow gorge of “Ash Hollow,” upon the banks of North Platte, which is the same muddy, uninteresting stream. It is below the forks, and renewed our acquaintance with roaring fires.

146

CHAPTER IX.

Drifting Sand—Court-House Rock—Uninteresting Scenery—More Rain—Its disagreeable Effect—Chimney Rock—Its Appearance—Fast decaying—Symptoms of Gold in the Ravines—Continued Rain—Damages our Provisions—Stopped by the Mud—Brandy Rations—Mount Ararat—Scenery improves—Indian Introduction—Air our Loading—Shoot Antelope—French Trapper—Fascinations of that Mode of Existence—Anticipations about Fort Laramie—The Fort itself—Obliging Governor—Trading at the Fort—Distance from Independence, and Time occupied in Travelling—Future Facilities—Determine on Packing—Dissuasions of the Governor unavailing—Crow Indians; their very bad Character—Faith in Indian Chivalry—Vote of Thanks—Troubles of Packing—Renewed Contests with the Mules—Their Antics—Difficulty of cording Packs—Pack turns; Conduct of the Mules thereon—Our first night's Bivouac as Packers—Black Hills; expansive View—Worrying Mishap and Delay—Moonlight Travel—Thoughts about the Crows—Long Day's Journey—Fatigue, Disappointment, Delight, and Apprehension—Unwelcome Sounds—Deliberation—The Appearance of the Country—Crickets and Ants—Our Precautions preparative to rest.

OUR next day's journey was through loose drifting sands, that reached from the river edge to the bluffs, not presenting a single feature worthy of note or comment either in vegetable or animal life, with the exception of a huge isolated rock, about six miles from the river, called by the trappers “Court-House Rock,” from its supposed resemblance to a large public building of that description; but there was nothing about it of that striking character to seduce me from my path so far 147 aside to visit it. From Court-House Rock the aspect of the country began to improve a little; a slight,

threadbare vegetation covering the surface, and keeping down the light sands, which before gave us considerable annoyance; a few stunted cedars, too, helped to relieve the dreary sameness of the scenery. We got tolerable camping-ground, and caught some nice fish in a small rivulet, which unlike most of the affluents of the Platte, was clear, cool, and fresh.

The following morning was most promising; and, continuing so up to our nooning, we spread out all our clothes and provisions to get the benefit of the sun, which, with its usual caprice in those quarters, retired behind a dark curtain, to make way for a teem of rain that poured down so copiously it ran in surface streamlets over the plains. I may literally say we came to anchor this evening in a sheet of water, the prairie, as far as we could see, presenting the same aqueous aspect. We were drenched with rain, and shivering from the cold raw wind, the measure of our grievances being filled up by a supper of raw meat and hard bread. We endeavoured to secure dry lodging by digging deep trenches round our tents, which had a temporary effect in draining the space on which they stood; but as there was not enough of fall to carry off the water, they filled up soon after we went to sleep, and when we awoke in the morning there was fully four inches of water around us on our robes. There was no abatement in the rain, and I felt sorely ill at ease as I saw the pitiable plight of the poor animals, standing with drooping heads, 148 their tails turned to the storm, unable to lie down from the water, which likewise covered their food. It was impossible to remain where we were, and likewise impossible to meet worse quarters; so, breaking fast with a second edition of last night's supper, we set out in the teeth of a penetrating wind, and under a drenching rain, to look for a patch of dry ground, be it ever so bare or barren, preceded by a scout, who we hoped would soon return with an olive branch to comfort us.

There was now observable through the mist high up in the clouds a pointed object, that looked like the top of some monumental erection, becoming more and more distinctly defined as we proceeded. With its base still enveloped in fog, we camped parallel with it on a slightly elevated patch that lay close along the river edge, where the water could not lodge, and the animals had some little picking; but I was grieved to find the breasts and shoulders of several of them scalded and stripping from the constant wet; however, we had enough amongst the rest of the troop to let those go free until the soreness abated. It was early in the day when we stopped, shaking in our dripping garments,

without anything to employ the interval until evening, or a spark of fire to heat our numbed limbs. Under these circumstances it was proposed that a party should go to the bluffs, about four miles distant, to try and pick up as many sticks of cedar as would cook us a warm supper—a proposition very generally approved of. We headed towards this tapering rock, called by roamers on the prairie "Chimney Rock," though, to my eye, there 149 is not a single lineament in its outline to warrant the christening. The Wellington Testimonial, in the Phoenix Park, elevated on a Danish Fort, would give a much more correct idea of its configuration, though not of its proportions. It is, I should say, five hundred feet high, composed of soft red sandstone, standing out from the adjoining cliffs, not so much like the result of a violent spasm of nature, as if from the wearing and wasting effects of the watery storms that prevail in those forlorn regions. It appears to be fast chipping and crumbling away, and I have no doubt that, ere half a century elapses, "Troja fuit" will apply to the Chimney Rock. After surveying it on every side, and adorning its base with some hieroglyphics, we went about gathering our firewood; and while ransacking the ravines I was quite astonished to find considerable deposits of that fine black sand which most generally indicates the presence of gold. I felt very anxious to dig a handkerchief full of earth, and wash it; but fearing, if my conjectures turned out correct, it should originate a diversity of opinion that might lead to a break-up of the party, I kept my surmise a secret. I should not be surprised, however, to hear at no very distant day that gold had been discovered along the valley of the North Platte.

We all got good back loads of dry cedar, which by the time we got to camp produced quite a calorific effect on the system without the process of ignition; three cheers saluting us as we cast them on the ground, for the idea of a jorum of hot coffee set us all in high 150 glee, and, to use a homely phrase, "it would have done your heart good" to have seen the style in which we tucked it in. The cold rain continued all night; and to our great mortification, when we arose from our wet beds in the morning, anticipating the luxury of a warm breakfast, it turned out there was not a splinter of wood left, the guards having indiscreetly burned it all during the night. This was very vexatious and provoking, the bluffs being too remote to think of going there again for fir-wood; but during the grumbling a shout of triumph issued from one of the waggons, in consequence of finding two large cheeses, the thin boxes around which, and an emaciated cotton shirt, enabled us

to concoct a lukewarm beverage, equally devoid of colour and taste—hot coffee par excellence. The continued wet and damp not only saturated our wearing apparel and bed-clothes, but began seriously to affect the best-protected packages. The soft sugar began, as the trade say, to “form foot,” dripping through the bottom of the waggons; even the refined article becoming moist and crumbling; the flour got mouldy, the powder lumpy, and no means or appliances of amending or arresting the evil.

Before starting, we helped all the animals to a basin each of thick gruel, which they stood sadly in need of, and then commenced our plashing march through the water, not making more than a mile an hour; nor had we proceeded at this snail's pace over a few miles, when our leading waggon got stuck fast and deep in a slough, the mules being so jibbed and cowed they could not be 151 got to pull an ounce; while every moment's pause caused the whole train to settle down so in the soft earth, that it almost looked as if we were destined to remain fixed in the mud until the waters subsided. We tried the task of extrication by selecting ten of the evenest pulling mules, making fast the fifth chains of the other waggons to the point of the tongue, so as to lead to firm footing; and after a tugging strain that partly opened the coupling rings, we got it out of the mire—an operation we had to repeat with the others; but as a precaution against the recurrence of such mishaps, two horsemen took it in turns to ride ahead to pick out the hardest ground for the future.

The rain now changed into sleet that completely benumbed us, depriving the drivers of all feeling in their fingers to hold the reins. We did not make over nine miles, and had not even the consolation of hitting on dry camping-ground; so that the men became wofully depressed, some of them looking as if labouring under the premonitory symptoms of ague; as a preventive to which I again served out brandy rations, there being no chance of a hot supper. Those not on guard huddled themselves into the waggons to try and generate animal heat by close contact; but with all our endeavours it was about the most trieste and dreary night I ever spent in my life.

A thick heavy fog hung over us in the morning for awhile, and then rolled away, revealing to us the face of our long-lost friend, the sun, who quickly dispelled the vapours of mind as well, and caused us to forget the 152 chills and ills of the last few days, the cleared atmosphere enabling us to see

ahead a dry rolling prairie, which gave rise to the profane cry, “Mount Ararat—Mount Ararat at last!” As we got on the elevated ground, we could see that the bluffs took a curve like the tail of a shepherd's crook, a prominent eminence forming the curl at the end. This is called “Scott's Bluff,” from the body of an enterprising trapper of that name being found upon it. It is supposed he lost his way, and having crawled up on it for a look-out, died of starvation. The sides of the bluffs were no longer smooth and sloping, but bold and rugged, belted with abrupt ledges of sandstone, and split by craggy ravines, well wooded with large cedar. As we advanced into the bend of the crook, over a fine rich grassy lea, the scene became heightened in beauty and interest, until, close under one of those fantastic cliffs, we found a rustic log-hut, the *country residence* of a Mr. Rouberdean, of St. Louis, a blacksmith by trade, who, foreseeing an active business from the overland emigration, settled himself in this sequestered nook, getting into sharp collision with the long dormant echoes of the neighbourhood, and taking unto himself a Sioux spouse, a perfect queen of the wilderness, whom I beg leave to introduce as the sister of the Indians who accompanied us from South Platte.

We arrived at an hour that afforded us ample time to spread out and dry our food, raiment, &c. but it smacked of desecration to see the enchanting spot, sacred to the spirit of solitude, strewed over with our blue-moulded 153 duds, and the tender flowerets, that would grace a Paradise, crushed beneath flour-bags and flitches of bacon. The distance hence to Fort Laramie was fifty-five miles, over a rolling country, covered with good pasture, but not calling for any especial notice. We met the Platte at several points, covered as usual with tufty islets, and shot two antelopes, that sufficed us till we arrived there. As we were rolling along the second day we saw a man running across the plain to meet us, who we first thought was an Indian, but as he came up proved to be a French trapper, clad in a buckskin suit, with a fine rifle on his shoulder. He spoke tolerable English, expressing his surprise that we could have managed to get thus far so early as the 26th of May. He informed us he was the son of an old French trapper, from the Hudson Bay settlement, brought out by his father when quite a boy; and that, after his death, he continued the same mode of life, having married the daughter of an Indian chief, in whose society he forgot every feeling or desire to visit the crowded thoroughfares of the world, procuring, as he said, the main staples of existence with his gun, and obtaining the few superfluities he desires at the fort, in exchange for the skins

of the game he kills. “It is no less singular than true,” that most men who frequent the hunting-ground of the Indian, either as trappers or tourists, contract a singular liking for their habits of life; and innumerable instances are on record where men of independent fortune have forsaken the conventionalities of polished society for the simple, unsophisticated 154 association of those children of nature, demonstrating the inherent tendency of man to the natural in preference to the artificial, wherever freewill is left a loose rein.

I gave a *carte-blanche* to my imagination as we drew nigh Fort Laramie, in view of the Black Hills (as they are called) at its back, seeing in “my mind's eye” a bold fortress, perched, in stern solitary grandeur, on a beetling crag, with corbled battlements bristling with cannon, encircled by chasms, through which mountain torrents roared vengeance on any of unbidden approach; but, “like the baseless fabric of a vision,” my glowing fancy vanished before the wretched reality—a miserable, cracked, dilapidated, adobe, quadrangular enclosure, with a wall about twelve feet high, three sides of which were shedded down as stores and workshops, the fourth, or front, having a two-story erection, with a projecting balcony, for hurling projectiles or hot water on the foe, propped all around on the outside with beams of timber, which an enemy had only to kick away and down would come the whole structure. It stands, or rather leans, upon a naked plain by the side of a rapid little river, in which a Frenchman named Laramie was drowned, yielding up his name both to the river and the fort. It is not a military station, but belongs to the “American Fur Trading Company,” who keep there a supply of trumpery merchandise, to exchange with the Indian and trapper for such skins as they can procure. On its early establishment the beaver abounded in all the rivers of this region; but now the trade is exclusively confined to buffalo robes. It may, however, 155 turn out a point of some importance if the overland route to California and Oregon commands a preference, though, in my opinion, there are other localities much more eligible as depôts for the accommodation of emigrants and travellers.

I found Mr. Husband, the manager, or governor as he is styled, a most obliging, intelligent, and communicative person. He offered us apartments to sleep in; but we did not deem it prudent to make a change in our living in that respect, lest it should afterwards affect our health; we, however, made use of the forge to tighten our wheel-tyres, and make other small repairs connected with the

waggon and harness. There were some Indians of the Sioux tribe about the fort trading while we were there, the trading colloquy between whom and Mr. Husband was most amusing, each praising their own and depreciating the value of the other's ware; rattling away with great volubility, “suiting the action to the word.” It requires great patience to carry on this system of dealing, the smallest bargain consuming as much time as the largest transaction; and it matters not how well soever the article may suit the Indian, or how much he may desire to secure it, he will never give way to precipitancy, yielding up his final acquiescence with an affectation of reluctance.

There is, besides the governor, a superintendent and ten men employed in stowing and packing robes and skins, who were all greatly in need of clothing of one 156 sort or another, and tempted us to give them a small supply from our wardrobes in exchange for some picked robes, that were infinitely superior to those we had. We also gave them a supply of sugar, coffee, tobacco, and flour, as they were completely out of those necessaries, and did not expect a supply for a couple of months.

It occupied us forty-three days reaching Fort Laramie, our stopping days inclusive, leaving an average for travelling days of eighteen miles per day, the distance being seven hundred miles from Independence. This, though tedious, was not so very slow, considering the sort of vehicles we travelled in, the loads we carried, and the nature of the roads and obstructions we had to deal with; but at a future day, when the track is more beaten, and the bad places bridged over and smoothed, it can be accomplished in a much shorter time, the more particularly as a lighter vehicle can then be used, and as traders, no doubt, will keep large stocks of supplies at the different points—caravans—instead of encumbering themselves with stores and necessaries for the entire trip, need only carry as much as will be necessary from post to post.

Since our favourable experience of Indian disposition from the Siouxs, the project was frequently discussed amongst us of picking out a small party, to go on, by means of pack-mules, from Laramie to California, to have a location selected for the company by the time they got up, and such preliminary preparations as would enable them to go to work without delay. The 157 smallness of the party was no longer considered a difficulty, and it only remained to agree upon the number, and

of whom it was to be made up. Eight at length was decided on as the strength, to be drawn by ballot from those who desired to exchange the tedious conveniences of waggon transit for the fatiguing and self-denying mode of travelling by pack-mules. In virtue of my captaincy I was accorded a free choice, and became an *ex-officio* packman. Out of the other seven chosen there were some well suited for the change, but others whose habits and physical conformation rendered them wholly unfit for the undertaking. However, there remained no method of rectifying the matter without creating jealousy and bad feeling. It was arranged we were to have a saddle-horse and pack-mule each, much preliminary trouble being avoided by obtaining full-rigged pack-saddles at the fort; but when we came to mention the matter to Mr. Husband, offering the waggons, which should be necessarily abandoned, in exchange for the pack-saddles, he discouraged the project as one of very great danger, and earnestly remonstrated, telling me that the Crows (Indians), through whose country we should pass for at least three hundred miles, were a fierce, cruel, and powerful tribe, whose vigilance we could not hope to elude, and that, even if our lives were saved (which he did not expect), we would assuredly be stripped of our clothes, provisions, arms, and animals, which would be tantamount to taking our lives: for a man might as well be thrown overboard in the ocean as abandoned 158 in such a condition on the prairie, illustrating his reasoning with many stories of the barbarous treatment that trappers who fell into their hands from time to time experienced. It was evident he made a deep impression on some of the elect; but for my part, entertaining an impregnable faith in Indian chivalry since my acquaintance with the Sioux, I had made up my mind to run the risk of being plucked by the Crows if only one more was to join me. In consequence of Mr. Husband's opinions the subject was again discussed, and four of the chosen men seceded, leaving, to my great delight, three of the *élite* of the party to face the danger.

This being determined on, there was nothing to prevent the waggons from proceeding, while the making, weighing, and adjusting of the packs would necessarily detain us at least another day. Before starting, however, there was a full muster of the original company, and a vote of thanks passed to me “for the judicious and careful manner I conducted the expedition to Laramie,” with other complimentary addenda I feel too modest to set forth. We retained nothing but absolute indispensables, forwarding the major part of our clothing by the waggons; our bread was wholly

hard bread, which saved us the carrying of an oven, and we exchanged our bacon for jerked buffalo-beef, of which they had a good supply at the fort; we did not take a tent, as it would be an unhandy article to pack, and despatch being our object, we were content to put up with some privations, in order that, with light-loaded animals, we might get to 159 our destination in good time. Mr. Husband got from an old trapper in his employ, who spent all his life in the region, a way-bill or table of route, as well as he could describe it, to Fort Bridger, giving distances and landmarks, by which we could be able to distinguish the places he thought best suited for camping. I took a copy for my own guidance, and Mr. L—s, who was promoted to be captain of the waggon-train, vice Kelly packed off, took another, starting at noon on May the 29th, to a camping-ground eleven miles from the fort.

We, the packers, were now busily employed making pack-sacks of a uniform size, and stowing and adjusting them, so that they should be of precisely equal weight, as the slightest preponderance would, from the perpetual jolting, sway them over despite of the tightest strapping. By evening this branch of preparation was concluded, and our pack-saddles rigged, with cruppers, britchings, lash-ropes, and apichments. Next morning, we caught the mules intended for packing, and with the aid and instruction of an experienced hand at the fort, commenced by far the most bothersome and temper-testing job we encountered yet; for as soon as the mules saw the pack-saddles they began shifting round and back again, so that we could not place them on their backs; and when we shortened their tyings to keep them still, they set to plunging and kicking, as if firmly bent on resistance; even two of them, that were hitherto remarkable for their extreme docility, being amongst the most violent of the rebels. By putting 160 touches on their ears, however—not having a nigger to seize them in his teeth—we got on the pack-saddles, which (as is always the case, and constitutes the chief repugnance of the mule to the pack) were girthed to such a degree, that you would almost think the indentation would cut through the skin, the mules humping their backs and swelling out their bellies to see and burst the ligatures; in which two of them succeeded, one, a roan mule, repeating it no less than five times. As soon as we succeeded in getting them all secured, we turned them loose upon the plain before putting on their packs, to let them do their worst; and, certainly, such a display of fantastic tricks and capers, such ground and lofty tumbling, I never saw

either off or on the stage before; they buck, jumped, kicked, and ventriloquised, then rolled on the ground, and the roan, failing in freeing himself by those means, turned round his head and actually tore the accoutrements off his back like a dog. The others gave in after a long bout; but the roan was so totally incorrigible we were obliged to take him for a riding animal, transferring his pack to the Buffalo horse; and even to this mitigated compromise it was very difficult to reconcile him at first, such was his abhorrence to the girth.

We now got on our packs, taking lessons in the complicated art of tying them, which, permit me to assure you, requires a long head to remember and a strong hand to execute, such is the variety and eccentricity of hitchings and twistings according to the Mexican mode, in which nation the science of packing animals ranks 161 amongst the learned professions. There was another exhibition of capers when the packs were put on, but of a subdued character and short duration; so that we were in our saddles, each man leading a mule, by two o'clock, intending to proceed to where our waggons camped the previous evening; and, taking kind leave of Mr. Husband, who reiterated his lectures and admonitions respecting the Crows, we commenced our journey anew.

I had not used my horse since the accident till now, so he was in fine plight from the rest, his wound being perfectly healed by the salve I got from the Sioux chief. All things considered, we made a smooth start, moving on slowly but propitiously for two miles or so, when, going down a hill, one of the packs worked so far forward the mule became restive, and putting down his head, kicked it over his shoulder, the saddle turning under his belly, and causing him to rear and kick until he liberated himself from all the straps and tyings, which were snapped and broken in divers places. This made a halt inevitable, and by the time everything was stitched, cobbled, and set to rights, it was too late to proceed. During supper large drops of rain forewarned us to look to our packs, for, having no tents, our robes and blankets were the only means we had of protecting them, it being preferable to go without sleep, and submit to a good ducking, rather than have our biscuits transmuted into lumps of dough, and our other provisions and ammunition damaged. It was a cold, trying night, and I very much question, if the waggons were 162 at hand, but there would have been other seceders from our limited ranks.

Soon after daylight we hauled the pack-animals close up to a cedar stump, and girthed the saddles, leaving them to accommodate themselves to them while we eat our breakfast. This over, we got on the packs, and after a multiplicity of offers, like children playing finger-cradle, we came upon the right tie at last, moving off under what we considered favourable auspices, and soon gaining an elevated ridge of prairie, where a new and truly sublime scene unfolded itself. The fort—which, like many other objects, living as well as inanimate, looks best at a distance—had quite an imposing appearance, reposing on the broad plain behind, by the side of its sinuous namesake; Laramie's peak to the south-west, rearing its cedar-clad sides and pointed crest into the clear blue heavens, standing amidst the black hills like a towering cathedral in a giant city; while, to the north-west, the distant rocky mountains and the snow-clad summits of the Wind river range mingled with the clouds, giving a scope to the view that tried the nerves of visions. The country was rolling and verdant in the extreme, though the hills, as viewed at a distance, had a sombre cast, from the deep green tint of the foliage that covered their sides. We were going along in great glee in this magnificent solitude, congratulating ourselves on the virtues of perseverance in having overcome the troubles and annoyances of packing, and although not yet adepts, looking forward at no short time to be perfect masters of the art, when the quietest 163 of the mules, as if in derision of our assurance, began, without any apparent cause whatever, jumping up all fours and kicking, till she bursted all the girths and straps, canting the pack and saddle to the ground, with such violence that it broke clean off in the middle of the tree.

I felt confoundedly annoyed, and let my temper effervesce in a variety of anathemas against the whole mulish progeny. It seemed to be a contest who should be the last to offer a suggestion, but there were no two ways about it; we required four pack-animals, and without another pack-saddle we could not budge. I therefore turned right about and galloped back to the fort, nine miles off, to procure one, getting over the ground at such a rate that I was back, and had the party again moving precisely two hours from the time of the accident. We took our dinners on our saddles, and got a refreshing quaff of good water, where we could see by the fire-rakings, our waggon friends had spent the night before last; we also filled our canteens and let the animals fill themselves, resolved upon travelling as long as we had light.

It was a delightful ride, ascending and descending grassy hills, and winding through sweet avenues, shaded with cedars of enormous growth, and fragrant with the delicious odours of scented shrubs and blossoming bushes. Towards dusk we came into a broken ravine, where winter floods are wont to revel; and, hoping to reach good grass and water at the other end, were enticed to proceed, from bend to bend, until the moon, 164 now at the full, lit up our path with her chaste silvery radiance. In passing through one of its narrow gorges we were startled unexpectedly by the noise of sticks snapping under the tread, and as we listened, every man silently, but instinctively, loosened his rifle from the loop, anticipating a surprise, but no Indian made his appearance. I believe, in reality, the sounds arose from the startling of deer, or some other animals, at our untimely intrusion. We emerged on an extensive plain, where, however, I found on alighting, the herbage so short I thought it better to proceed, as it could not prove worse. Conversation was suspended during the residue of our march, for as we rode by the side of our cold shadows on the trackless plain, far far away from aid or succour, the admonitions of Mr. Husband obtruded themselves upon our minds, and wrapped us in a contemplative reserve, until at the bottom of a slope, on the south-west, the beams of the moon now appeared to be reflected from a sheet of water, which, though some distance at right angles with our path, we resolved to camp at, lest in our moonlight rambling we should lose our reckoning.

Next day at dawn we resumed our march, the route being over high rounded hills of light calcareous soil, without any timber, till noon, when they became bolder and broken, and intersected with streams. We travelled a few hours by the banks of one brisk rivulet not laid down by name in my way-bill, where we were sorely tempted to wait an hour, it was so thickly inhabited with fish. Deer were very plentiful about, and buffalo, 165 too, were frequently seen in very small herds of twos and fours, on which we could have easily stolen, from the nature of the country; but being now with pack-mules, we could not hamper ourselves with an atom beyond our positive requirements. Calculating we would continue to meet streams throughout the day, we held on our course; imagining, too, that it was just possible we might overhaul the waggons before night. The hills became steeper and more thickly timbered as we advanced, pine being largely interspersed with the cedar; but we got seat-sore, and our horses jibby, without any prospect of water; and having come,

according to our estimate, full forty miles, I was unwilling to trespass more upon the animals; but the day had been so hot, and the evening so close and sultry, there was no doing without it.

We all alighted, leading our horses; the mules having become reconciled to their new employment followed without leading, poking into every split or crevice, until we became so jaded, three out of the four voted for a halt; but the other gentleman, being better bottomed and more sanguine, left us his horse and went on by himself round an angle of timber in quest of a pool or brook. He was absent some time, and we were indulging in a wayside snooze, with the stock browsing around us, when I thought a whistle struck upon my tympanum. I listened a little, and the shrill notes were repeated; so I aroused my companions, who toddled on, seeing our friend, as we rounded the clump, sitting by the edge of a pool of water. This cheered up our 166 flagging spirits, and we hastened forward to cool our cracking palates; the horses, too, espying the precious banquet that glistened before them, trod upon our heels in their anxiety to reach it, while the unmannerly mules did not wait for their masters, but scampered off to have the first of the feast. A sad mortification, however, awaited us, for the water was a stagnant mineral pool, emitting a foetid stench, too strong even for our seasoned nerves, or those of the animals, who did nothing more than smell to it.

We were greatly out of sorts at the disappointment, our chagrin being increased by the way in which our friend seemed to enjoy it; but as he saw we got sulky and querulous, he pulled his canteen from behind him, and stopped our mouths effectually with a draught of most delicious water, pointing to some green willows at the base of the hill, where there was a bubbling well of crystal water,of which we drank so liberally, although aware it was improper, that we lost all relish for supper. It was laughable to see the mules (who could only get in one at a time between two rocks) nipping the posteriors of him in possession, until retaliation became stronger than thirst. There was a little drawback to our gratification, though, in the number of fresh mocassin prints about the place, clearly not over a day old, which prevented my firing at a buck that passed quite close to us, lest the report should bring some unbidden guests to supper. We were also content to forego the pleasure of a fire on the same account, making our evening's repast on jerked beef and biscuit.

Next morning we got upon a magnificent alluvial bottom, stretching north and south some miles, with a broad belt of heavy timber winding through it, from which, as we approached, we heard the sounds of running water—a lovely stream, fifty feet wide, coursing covertly within its shade. From this we began to ascend a high wooded ridge for better than two miles, from the top of which we saw a thin column of smoke issuing through the trees below, exactly in the direction of our trail. As this could only proceed from an Indian encampment, we diverged in a southerly course, under the influence of the axiom, “prudence is the better part of valour;” nor had we any obstacles to contend with, as there was no brush whatever, and the sod was as smooth as the close-mowed beds of a pleasure-ground. As we descended into the bosom of the vale, about on a parallel with the place from which the smoke issued, we could distincly hear at intervals the swell of voices, succeeded a moment after by a wild, prolonged whoop, which, of course, we set down as the result of their having descried us, through some of the long vistas in the timber. Now came the time for testing the disposition of the Crows, as I imagined; and while I strove to satisfy myself they were a chivalrous tribe, misrepresented like the Sioux, I could not, by any process of assurance, gain over my nerves from a prejudice in favour of Mr. Husband's opinions. However, we proceeded as if nothing occurred, everything in readiness, with a positive injunction that no one should attempt to fire until the evil intentions of the Indians were made 168 clearly manifest. The question was asked, “Were they to drive off the animals, how should we act?” The answer—“Fire by all means,” as, without them, we might as well be on a barren rock in the ocean.

Hearing no further sounds, we made sure they were closing upon us stealthily; still we could not discover any sign of their approach. We were now ascending the opposite rise, midway up which the timber ceased, and were at first undecided whether we should emerge from it or not, as we would then be without any screen; but the Fabian policy not suiting our book, we went steadily ahead, and passed over the crown of the ridge without any interruption, which led us to think the shout originated from some other cause, and that we were still unobserved—a conjecture I believe to be correct, for we neither saw nor heard any symptoms of further Indians during the day.

The country was broken and exceedingly undulating, sparely covered with timber in the vicinity of streams, in which, curious enough, not a bird of any description was to be seen; nor had the notes of a feathered warbler saluted our ears since we left Larimie, though we passed through groves and dells, where one would think they would delight to dwell. However, their paucity was counterbalanced by the swarms of crickets and large ants, that continued to increase as we penetrated the black hills, until the surface became completely covered with them, so that you could not avoid killing several at every step. They kept up a purring sort of noise, and emitted a very disagreeable effluvia, 169 and also annoyed our animals exceedingly, for some of them that could fly would come bang against a mule's or horse's nose, and make him wheel suddenly round, to the danger of his rider, or disarrangement of his pack. I got a blow from one myself under the eye, which drew blood slightly, and caused a swelling and great discolouration of the skin. Every hollow we passed through was watered with a nice stream of cool clear water, affording good picking along their banks. We travelled to an advanced hour, expecting to see the waggons in corral from every hill we ascended; but we had to halt for the night without any other society than ants and crickets. We tried various modes of banishing those disagreeable visitors, and had recourse as a last expedient to firing a patch of grass on a small knoll, where we purposed resting our wearied limbs; but the last curl of smoke had no sooner passed away than they again invaded the wasted territory, leaving us without any alternative but to lie down in the crowd with handkerchiefs over our faces, least any of them should jump down our throats by mistake in the dark. I also tied the legs of my pantaloons at the bottoms, to prevent their playing leapfrog on my shins or elsewhere, but remained a long time sleepless, as I felt them climbing up the sides of my cheeks and warming their toes, round where the breath exhaled through the silk.

CHAPTER X.

Large dry River-bed—Notice nailed to a Tree—Forced Marches of the Waggons—Buffalo Break —Long Day's Journey—No Sign of Waggons—Bad Policy of forcing Travel on such a Journey —Indians about—Report of a Gun at Daybreak—Our Waggon Friends at length—The Ferry of

the Platte—Mormon Encampment—The Crossing—Lamentable Accident—Incommunicativeness of the Mormons—Fearful Mule-track above the River—Description of the Passage—The Sand Tick Nuisance—“ *Travelling* makes us acquainted with Strange Bedfellows”—Artemesia—“Long Threatening comes at last”—The Crow Indians—We treat them with Confidence—They treat us with Treachery—The Scuffle—Our Good Fortune—Annihilation of our Packing Fixtures—Ruse to Escape their Vengeance—Midnight Travel—Come up to the Waggon Camp—New Arrangement —Volcanic Debris—Bitter Water—Distant View of the Wind River Range—Sal Eratus Lakes —“The Sweetwater”—Independence Rock—Misnomer of the River—Wonderful Canon—Our Last Buffalo—Surprise a Party of Crows—Their great Fright—Artemesia Fire—No Buffalo west of the Rocky Mountains. WE arranged an early start, in order to make sure of catching up with our company, and were, accordingly, moving at the grey dawn. The country was very hilly for about ten miles, and then gradually subsided into large level tracts. We crossed in the course of the morning a river, which, from the width and depth of its nearly dry bed, must be one of very large volume in the wet seasons, though there were no mountains or hills in view calculated to feed such a current, and nooned rather late at another river, broad and rapid, where we 171 found a notice nailed to a tree, informing us “that our company had camped there the night before,” leaving them the whole morning's travel still ahead, which proved they must have been forcing up the steam rather strongly, making their daily average over twenty-five miles, to show us packers, I suppose, that we could not so easily outstrip them after all. We began our evening's march at a brisk pace, determined to join them, but soon got into a sandy district, with the travelling very deep and distressing, where we met a herd of about a dozen buffalo, ploughing down through it at full split, with their long tongues hanging and dripping, as if they were after a long chase. It so happened that we would just meet, and come in contact, had we and they continued their course; so that we gave way, reining in till they passed close by the noses of our horses, for so determined were they to go straight on, they would have rushed over and trampled on us. It was evident they broke from pursuit, as they would not of their own accord go at such a rate; but whether it was from a hunting party belonging to the waggons, or from Indians, we had no means of judging.

The sand-flat was bounded by a low ridge of the same material, where the animals sank to their bellies at every step; but as soon as we got over it we again espied the Platte, with a lovely level grass plain betwixt it and the sand-ridges, stretching away beyond view, without rush or bramble, or a glimpse of the waggons, to gladden the sight. We now increased our pace to a smart canter, crossing numerous clear streams, running 172 eagerly to lose their fair name in the contaminating flood at our side; continuing at this rate for eight or ten miles, we were disappointed at not catching up with the waggons, though, by the look of the ordure, they certainly could not have passed more than an hour. It was now seven o'clock, and our horses showed they came more than forty miles, my brother packers as well betraying tokens of lassitude; but I coaxed them on as far as a clump of cotton-wood trees, about two miles ahead, where I promised to stop, whether we overtook the others or not; and there we did stop, without finding them.

It was very desirable, no doubt, to get over the journey as quickly as possible; but it was very bad policy to make forced marches without any urgent necessity, with fifteen hundred miles, the Rocky Mountains, and the Sierra Nevada yet to be surmounted. This I strongly felt, though no longer responsible, and made up my mind to express it the moment I had the opportunity.

According to our way-bill, and comparing it with our computed travel, we could not be far off the next crossing of the Platte, the point I now conjectured they strove to make, and one, from what I heard of its difficulty and danger, I sincerely wished we were all safe over, as its channel there gets so comparatively narrow, it becomes much too deep for fording; while its current is so excessively swift, the passage in a waggon-bed is a matter of extreme risk and labour. The sands about our encampment bore the impress of 173 mocassins and bare feet so thickly and so newly made, the wonder was we could not see any living proofs of the Indian neighbourhood; and I assuredly would have been much more comfortable to have seen them *in propriâ personâ* than to remain under the impression that they were lurking about us. As we could not by any means expect to get clear through their territory unseen, leading the errant life they do, I was anxious at once to meet the redoubted Crows, and be relieved from further suspense whatever might be the consequence. We

left the cricket and ants on the other side of the sand-hills, but in their stead we had gloomy visions of black Crows, more than three in number, to haunt our slumbers.

We tied on our packs and saddled our horses in the morning twilight, and soon after commenced our march, startling deer and antelope out of every slope, but giving them no molestation. About the time the sun arose, the report of a gun reached our ears, at which I cantered on to the rise before us, and there had revealed to view our fugitive friends in the act of hitching up. It was just as I expected; the waggon animals were overdriven, as evidenced by their raw shoulders and sluggish gait. They pressed us for an exchange, to which I acceded in so far as the mule "as would not pack" and another with a sore tail, caused by a bad crupper, the raw shoulders being of as little moment in packing as the sore tails in harness. We travelled on in company to the crossing point, discussing the matter in all its bearings, and arranging the order of work; 174 but as I was accustomed to boats and boating all my life, I was obliged to consent to be the Palinurus of the occasion, steering the light waggon-bed, for which we had a capital set of paddles, knowing the necessity for using them would frequently arise. However, to our great relief and joy, we found at the crossing a body of Mormons strongly entrenched in a heavy timber palisading, for their own protection and the security of their animals, as they informed us they were attacked by the Crows *en route*; and as they beat them off, their numbers being then small, they apprehended an attack from a larger body. Not very consolatory tidings for us packers, but we swallowed them without a question, and held our peace.

The Mormons, always on the look-out for gain as well as glory—or salvation, more properly speaking—travelled all the way from Salt Lake, over four hundred miles, to establish a ferry, anticipating a large overland emigration, and knowing there was no other point of passing, they finished two dug-out canoes since they came, on which they constructed a large platform, capable of carrying a loaded waggon in safety. This structure they worked with three large oars, one at each side, and one as a rudder, getting over smoothly enough, but at a terrible slant, which gave them hard labour in again working up against the stream, even with the assistance of two yoke of oxen pulling on the bank as on a canal. We got all our waggons, packs, luggage, harness, &c., over without any accident or interruption, but not so our animals; those we drove up a quarter of 175 a

mile, to give them space enough to work to the other shore at the proper landing, where alone they could get out as they reached the bank; and I have no doubt they would have gone over as they did on former occasions, by driving them in, but a young man, named Masters, took it into his head, contrary to the general remonstrance, to ride the bell-mare, getting on very well for two-thirds of the way, to where the channel of the river ran with a seething sweep along the opposite shore.

Here the mare, instinctively dreading the danger, turned round as she felt the influence of the current, and nearly all the mules being close upon her haunches, were carried, by their own impetus and that of the flood, right against her, rolling her and her rider under the water, and passing clean over. It was some moments after they passed when the mare again appeared, but she came to the surface without a rider, swimming languidly, unable to stem the stream, and pulling up her head violently at times, as if the bridle got foul of something below. We ran down the banks on each side, hoping to get a glimpse of poor Masters; not that we expected, after such a lapse of time, we could rescue him alive, but we were desirous to pay him the poor tribute of a rude burial. The mare at length gained the other shore, fully a mile below the point at which the waggons landed, but, instead of struggling up to dry land, she stood with her head drooped, looking so exhausted she seemed unable to move. Two of the men went down to where she was, and finding a weight attached to the bridle, they pulled on it, bringing to the 176 surface one of poor Masters's arms, who had the rein firmly clutched in his hand in his death-grasp, which was the cause of the bad landing made by the mare, and of the tugging and chucking with her head that we remarked after her submersion. We had no wood to make a coffin, so we wrapped the body in a blanket, and lowered it into a deep grave, marking the spot with the stump of a cotton-wood tree, on which we carved his name, and the manner of his death.

I did not feel disposed to recommence travelling that evening, nor would we, if there was any grass about; but it was drifting sand all around, leaving us no other alternative but going on about five miles to where the Mormons said we would find good camping, as they stopped there, at good grass and water, on their way across. They requested payment of the ferryage in coffee and flour, allowing us a price that left a profit of two hundred per cent., and gave us a fresh way-bill up to the point where the Salt Lake trail diverges in a more southerly direction from the one we were to

follow. Having a great desire to visit the new settlement of the Latter-Day Saints, as they delight in styling themselves, I made several inquiries respecting the difference of distances and comparison of routes, should we take it into our heads to change our minds and go that way; but I saw there was an evident reluctance to impart any encouraging information, as if they disliked the idea of our passing through their capital. I could not then divine the reason; but this very coyness only served to increase my anxiety, as interdict is always sure to beget desire, 177 since the season of the memorable apple down to the days of Bluebeard, and thence to the present generation.

The waggons, from the very deep sand and high hills, were constrained to make a wide circuit; but with the pack-mules we took an Indian foot trail along the river in a direct line, the banks becoming high and precipitous as we proceeded, the path continuing to run close by the edge. After a few miles' progress we commenced ascending the hip of lofty sandstone bluffs in single file, as the trail would not admit of more. It wound up the heights impending over the river at such easy gradients we scarcely perceived our elevation, until we came to a sharp angle, where it suddenly narrowed, and the side of the hill became perfectly upright, with the river foaming at its base. My horse stopped short with a snort and a shudder that first made me feel the imminence of the danger —there was barely space for him to stand, as he leant inwards, crushing my knee and shoulder against the face of the rock. I looked cautiously round to see if there was any chance of retracing our steps, but immediately saw there was none—not even room for a goat to turn round—while the horse-men and pack-animals were all in a string, quite close together, pressing against one another in consequence of my stop. I felt my head queer, and would have dismounted if I could, but this was impracticable. While wavering from nervousness in this awful situation, my horse got a smart nip behind from an impatient mule, that made him wince, and what with the squeeling and noise in the rear, I knew they were biting and 178 crowding each other, of which I had soon further proofs by their shoving bodily forward my trembling nag; so, seeing there was nothing for it but advance, I gently urged him, giving him full rein, when, with stooped head and distended eyes, he shuffled forward a little; leaning aside so much, he lacerated my knee very badly, till coming to a place where the path shelved so quickly outwards as to render the limited footing fearfully hazardous, he propped out his fore-legs, as if resolutely bent on going no further; but there was not time for a

second's reflection, when the mules came bump against him, with an impetus that sent him sliding along.

I now yielded myself to fate, expecting the next instant would consign me to eternity; and was so completely robbed of consciousness I did not observe how the pass was got over. When I was able to draw a full breath I saw we had attained our greatest eminence, and though we had a little more room for descending, it was so steep, the only mode of getting down was by sliding on the breech. This was fine fun for the mules, who are perfectly at home in such places, and actually seemed to enjoy the terror of the horses, as I have seen boys ridicule the apprehensions of their more timid companions; for when mine would essay a cautious slide, the imp behind would cast himself off with such reckless abandonment, as to come on top of us in a few yards, his fore-feet on my shoulders, indulging in a jocular pinch at every pause. As we descended, however, both man and horse got reassured, and I felt myself perfectly at ease, when my horse, to make up for a 179 long arrear of joking and nipping, sent out his heels with a whizz that put an end to the game for the present. It was a trying half-hour, and I do not think I could be bribed by all the gold the mules could carry to ride over the same track again.

We came to the camp-ground and had our food cooked before the waggons came up. Being here on a considerable eminence, with a strong cool breeze blowing, we were not much troubled with musquitoes, but there was a sand-tick, like a small clock, that crawled all over us, finally fixing on delicate places, where they stuck themselves into the skin with a tenacity that tested the strength of the finger-nails in dislodging them. There was nothing of the epicurean about them either, for they did not exhibit a partiality or preference for any one sample of blood over another, each individual being fully favoured with their patronage. Our skins looked as if we spent the night under soot drops; but the worst of it was, they got established in legions in the buffalo robes, from which there was no combing of them. I often heard the old say quoted, that “Poverty makes us acquainted with strange bedfellows;” but if I had any finger in the next edition of the Book of Proverbs, I would substitute “Travelling” for “Poverty,” and maintain I would be fully warranted for the liberty with antiquity.

From the length of our daily journeys since we left Laramie, we thought it but fair-play to the animals to give them a day of comparative ease, by travelling slowly with the waggons; so next morning we permitted 180 them to start two hours before us. The country in this region is hilly, broken, and sandy, covered with artemesia (wild sage), which we here met for the first time. There were lots of antelope, and when we over-took the waggons we found they had shot two. It was very late ere we reached a place to enjoy our mid-day rest; and half-blinded though we were with the drifting sand, we discovered in many places numerous horse-tracks coming from the opposite direction, which we knew must be Indians, as we met no travellers—the party, as we surmised, from whom the Mormons apprehended the attack; and I am almost ashamed to admit we were selfish and unamiable enough to felicitate ourselves on the supposition that they were travelling evidently in a different course from us.

About three o'clock we came to a brackish stream, flowing through a level barren tract, surrounded with high hills, and covered with a thick plumage of artemesia. Halting here, we gave the waggons another start; but just as we were in the act of mounting, after tying on our packs, a body of Crow Indians came down upon us at a sharp gallop. The moment we perceived them, with one impulse every rifle was levelled against them, but I forbade the pulling of a trigger without orders. They as instantly pulled up short, seeming to converse with one another. There was one squaw amongst them, with a great head-dress of feather, and as well as we could count, thirty-seven men, all nobly mounted. After a short conversation they came forward at a slow walk, making pacific signals of all sorts. My comrades, I 181 must do them the justice to say, were averse to allowing them to come amongst us, and wished to fire; but bearing in mind how agreeably I was undeceived by the Siouxs, I over-persuaded them to permit the Crows to approach.

I mounted my horse in the front, while the chief and two others advanced, one on each side and one right before me, he held out his hand, and as I returned the civility, dropping my rifle on the horn of my saddle, and poising it with my left hand, he seized it with a firm grasp, the fellow on the opposite side clutching the rifle; but as both our hands were moist from perspiration, I succeeded in freeing myself, and pulled my revolver from my belt, my left side opponent, at the same time laying

the muzzle of an old carabine on my cheek, which providentially missed fire, while the savage in front seized hold of the bridle-rein; but the horse, excited by the bustle, reared from the restraint, and pawing out violently, struck him a severe blow, that unhorsed and disabled him. Meantime, as I wheeled round, I saw the remainder of the band scuffling with my comrades, and others vainly endeavouring to drive off the mules from the horses; at length, as one of our party got a gash from a tomahawk, and our peril became pressing, Mr. D—e discharged a pistol, breaking the jaw of a savage, who set up a wild howl, and followed it up by firing another barrel, that took effect in the withers of an Indian horse, and sent him and his rider off in full retreat, followed closely by five or six others; the remainder 182 pausing to calculate their chances, were decided in their course by a joint discharge, which sealed the doom of one, and caused the others to fly. Those who ran first, now turned, and fired three guns, one of which grazed S. M'Q—n on the cheek; but, from the extraordinary whizzing of their contents, I think they must have been loaded with stones, that did not present a smooth surface to the atmosphere. In return for this we discharged two rifles, that brought another fellow down, and carried further dismay amongst them, were we to judge by the rapidity of their flight. Of course we did not attempt pursuit; we had quite enough to do to get our mules together and rearrange our packs, several of which were thrown off and scattered in the *mêlée*, and our accoutrements so smashed and tattered, it was a question if we could manage to bring all along, so as to rejoin the waggon, for we apprehended a night attack, in which we could have no earthly chance by ourselves.

While endeavouring to patch up, we saw our enemies watching us from the heights, which hurried our efforts at despatch, for fear they should come down upon us with a reinforcement; but it was a long hour before we could manage a start, and then at so slow and cautious a pace, lest our temporary fixings should give way, that I felt we could not come up with the waggons by sundown. Knowing we were dogged, and could only escape by a *ruse*, when night came on we made a feint of camping, and lit a large fire, as if we intended settling for the night; but as soon as it 183 became dark we buckled up again, and set forward, calculating on a good start, as we knew they would wait until they thought we would be locked in sleep. It was provokingly dark, one of us being obliged to walk to pick out the trail; and, to add to our hazard and vexation, the mules now and

then uttered a bray, expressive of their astonishment at our unusual proceedings, which we thought rendered our detection inevitable. At length, after three hours' groping in the dark, they set up a simultaneous braying, as if the foe was in the midst of them, but, to our great relief, it elicited a congenial response not far off, that gave token of our proximity to the waggon-camp. The noise and bustle of our arrival aroused all the men, who, in their great anxiety to hear all particulars, kept us up until the grey streak along the horizon foretold the approach of day.

On overhauling our trappings in the morning, we found them in such a sorry state it would have been madness to think of proceeding without a thorough repair; and in talking the matter dispassionately over again, we all agreed, as a funny fellow remarked, “that the Crows gave us *caws* for coinciding in Mr. Husband's opinion at last;” so we entered into a new arrangement, one of us going to each waggon or mess, and taking our animals to strengthen the teams, leaving six to the waggon (save one), and, from the strength of our troop of animals, and their spirits and condition, we felt sanguine about making a speedy trip of it.

This day's journey was through a scorched-looking country, covered with volcanic debris, very thickly strewn in places, and the water, everywhere we met it, so strongly impregnated at one time with salt, at another with sulphur and alkali, that it was wholly unfit for use. The sun was very hot, and we were correspondingly thirsty, when we came to a beautifully pellucid pond, from which issued a laughing, gurgling stream, that caused us all to hurry forward to bathe our shrivelled lips in its cool liquid; but, alas! we found it an arrant cheat, so thoroughly briny as to be altogether undrinkable: even the mules would not condescend to sip it; they, however, bathed themselves well in it by lying down, and seemed much refreshed by the operation.

The conical peaks of the Wind River range of snowy mountains were very visible this evening, as well as the indentation on the summit of the Rocky Mountains, which has got the name of the South Pass. We passed several small lakes, which presented a very strange appearance to the untravelled eye, looking like large fields of frosted snow, but were thick incrustations of carbonate of soda, caused by the evaporation of the mineral waters. It looked so beautifully pure, and tasted so well,

we threw out all our chemical compounds, and supplied ourselves liberally with superior saleratus from this great natural laboratory, which we found made better bread than what we were in the habit of using. Soon after leaving them, we struck the Sweetwater, a river of considerable magnitude, which we heard 185 abounded with fish; but I cannot confirm the character by our experience, for we did not get as much as a solitary nibble, though we tried hard. Our camp this evening was at the base of Independence Rock, as the trappers call it, which stands close by the river, on a stoneless plain, isolated and immense; and although one would suppose it must be the result of some angry whim of nature, there is no trace of convulsion about its smooth face or level bed to warrant the conclusion.

The Sweetwater is altogether a misnomer, being bitter of the two, carrying so much alkali in solution as to be destructive to fish. Five or six miles beyond our camp it cañons* through a perpendicular fissure, called Devil's Gate, where it rushes with great noise and velocity through its pent-up channel, along which there is no margin whatsoever, the rocks rising on each side about three hundred feet high. We crossed the river ere we came thus far, where it spreads out on a shoal gravelly bed, enabling us to ford it without difficulty. At the Devil's Gate we left the river, proceeding over a fertile level prairie, where we shot our last buffalo, and were near losing a horse (not our Buffalo horse) into the bargain; he got gored up the thigh, very narrowly escaping having the wound in the flank, where it would have been fatal. Although rising and descending for several weeks over hills and rising ground, it was evident the balance was largely in favour of ascent, but from Independence Rock the upward incline was almost invariable, and much of the ground 186 deep heavy sand, which made our progress very slow indeed.

Canon signifies a gorge.

At noon we met the Sweetwater again, and were very much puzzled whether to cross and proceed up a narrow defile, where there were some traces of a trail, or keep on the side we were; at length we decided on remaining on the southern side, and fagged along till we came to a willowy dip of land, where we got grass and water. Before we halted we saw through the glass some Indians crouched on the brow of a hill that lay to the left hand of our course, and as we got into a hollow that hid us temporarily from their view, six horsemen galloped round to outflank them; I kept

my eye on them through the glass as we again came in sight, but they did not appear to suspect anything at the moment; very shortly, however, thirteen or fourteen of them jumped up and disappeared, at the next instant reappearing on horseback. Plunging down the steep hill-side before us we galloped at them, raising a tremendous shout, that was taken up and echoed by our friends in the rear, so that the poor devils fancied themselves done for. They rode like furies, jumping through the thick bushes of artemesia; but although we could readily have shot some of them, we had no idea of harming them, merely getting up the affair as a little pastime to keep the men's spirits from stagnating. They dropped two fine robes, a black bearskin, some bows and arrows, and a couple of things that I think, from the way in which they fit the head, were intended for war-masks.

187

We had this evening our first fire of artemesia, which throws out great heat, but is too quick for comfort. It is a strange but benign provision of Providence, without which it would be a matter of extreme difficulty, if not entire impossibility, to cross the plains, that as the buffalo-chip becomes scarce the artemesia increases in abundance, and affords the unsheltered traveller a fire to cook his food, when no other fuel is within his reach upon the desert sands. I suppose it is the prevalence of this shrub that stops the buffalo, for you cease to meet a single indication of his presence within the region where it prevails, their range in those latitudes being confined to the eastward of the Rocky Mountains, the only game that inhabits those vast and dreary wastes being the wary antelope.

188

CHAPTER XI.

Lodge Pole-marks—Indian mode of Removing—Increase of Artemesia and Lizards—Fine View—South Pass—Contrast with the Imagination—Horse and Lodge Pole-marks—Cold Nights and Hot Days—Immense Indian Encampment—Our Feelings on seeing it—Move down to Camp on the River opposite them—Saluted by a White Man in our own Language—M. Vasquez, of Fort Bridger—Tells us they are Shoshonee, or Snake Indians—Their Character and Habits—Adopt the Salt Lake Route—Origin of Fort Bridger—M. Vasquez' Speculation—Imposing Cortége—Trade with the Snakes—Enter the South Pass—The Pacific Springs—Thoughts of Home—Royal Bedfellow

—Distance from Independence—Thoughts on Waggon Travel—Excitement of Travelling in New Countries—Severe Frost—Mountain Sickness—Appearance of the Country—Curious Buttes—The Little Sandy—Big Sandy—No Heath in America—Green River—Story of the Old Pawnee Mocassin.

NEXT day we got out of the deep sandy district into a light sandstone soil, covered with a short close herbage, the country very rolling, and some of the ascents very long, but excessively steep. There was no timber at all within view, nor any feature or object that lent a common interest to the view, so far as scenery was concerned; but in the course of the morning we saw innumerable horse-prints and countless lodge-pole trails directly in our route, and travelling in the same direction. Those we knew were the marks of a tribe of Indians, travelling with all their household goods to 189 settle in a new location. The marks were new, and, from our comparative rates of travelling, we imagined they would gain considerably on us, a circumstance which, from their apparent numbers, would afford us infinite satisfaction; we were in expectation, too, that they might diverge and leave us our course free.

We struck the Sweetwater again, rather early for stopping, but, as the feed was abundant, and we did not know how soon we should meet water again if we went on, we remained on its banks for the night, and damaged a good deal of our provisions in getting over it, as it proved much deeper than we expected. There was no timber, but artemesia, of which we made our fragrant fires; but it was a perfume we were soon destined to get tired of and disgusted with. The sand-tick were here in great force, and soon fastened an acquaintance on us; there were also immense numbers of small lizards flitting about, from which, however, we experienced no annoyance, as they are timid reptiles, and avoid the neighbourhood of man.

Although the days were oppressively warm, we had severe frosts at night, and even within our tents the hair on the edges of our robes were quite white. In the mornings, at dawn, the brilliant sun sparkling on the hoar drapery of the distant Wind River range had a fine effect; but the inhospitable aspect of the dreary wastes of sage and sand, almost incapable of supporting aught else than insects and reptiles, cast a saddening gloom over the spirits.

The South Pass was now clearly distinguishable, 190 widely differing from the pass we pictured in our glowing fancies. The name of the Rocky Mountains and the South Pass engendered a chain of mental associations that conjured up ideas of stupendous crags and beetling cliffs, on whose spiral summits the fleecy clouds perpetually nestled on spotless beds of everlasting snow, and narrow chinks and darkened chasms, through which the trembling traveller hurried, fearing to pause, and comtemplate the sublime creations of nature, lest the dripping cracks should close and shut him into eternity. How widely different was the reality: a range of rounded mountains, without cone or peak, with a sloping gap some thirty miles wide, approached so gradually, that, only for the temperature at night, you could scarcely conceive you were on the summit of one of the ranges which in our geographical lessons we were wont to consider one of the great marvels of creation.

We had the horse-tracks and lodge-pole trails still ahead of us on our path, making, no doubt, for the pass too. The country was much the same as yesterday, but the “indecent sun” kept “baking, broiling, burning on,” though we were near 7000 feet above the heads of our numerous acquaintances and distant relations. We made no noon stop, having had no temptation; nor, from appearances around, was there any prospect of better evening's fare. So I sent (for be it known to you I was reinstated in my command) to examine the country, and find a good camping-ground, even were it out of our line, for it was impossible our 191 animals could work unless their stamina was kept up by nutriment. About four o'clock we saw them returning on the trail we were travelling, but could distinguish by their gait and air “our course *did not* run smooth.” They found water, that is, they saw it at a distance from them; and they also found, that is, they saw at a distance from them, beside the stream, an immense Indian encampment, surrounded with a multitude of horses, so large that they questioned the prudence of proceeding. It was rather a difficult card to play, so I called a temporary halt to canvass opinion, and prepare, if necessary, for the encounter, for we were still in the country of the Crows, the Rocky Mountains being the boundary of their dominions to the westward. It was admitted that water should be had at all risks or hazards; but the lie of the country forbade the hope of finding it in any other direction; and, moreover, as our party had been unavoidably seen by the Indians, it was quite as well to go on and risk a conflict where they were as elsewhere, for they would assuredly follow us if bent on mischief. The preponderance of those

considerations being in favour of going straight on, we made no further delay, looking to our arms and ammunition as we advanced. An hour's march brought us within view of the encampment, which covered thirty acres—the hillsides for more than three miles around being actually alive with horses and ponies.

As we descended the slope towards the river I kept a sharp look-out through the glass, to see if they were preparing any hostile demonstration, but I discerned 192 none, not even as much as a curious group striving to gaze at the equipments of the pale-faces. I thought I could perceive an object like a waggon in the middle of their camp; however, the improbability of such a circumstance made me place it to other account. We now got so close that all their motions could be seen distinctly with the naked eye; yet they did not appear to take the slightest notice, or bestow any attention on us. Some were squatted, with their pappooses playing about them, and others were moving about amongst the wigwams and horses. Our waggons came along as close as they could travel, with the horsemen close up too; but as the trail, leading to the ford and from it, penetrated the very centre of the encampment, I determined on pitching our tents on our own side, though the feed was very indifferent, thinking, if they did not attack, they might move off early in the morning and leave the road open; besides, it would be easier to guard our animals. However, as we were drawing up into corral, a white man, habited in civilised costume, approached, riding over the stream, shouting loudly but unintelligibly, which caused me to go down to ascertain his meaning; when, after saluting me politely, he introduced himself as M. Vasquez, of Fort Bridger.

He told me we had better cross into the good pasture, as there was no danger to be apprehended, for though still in the Crow country, the tribe on the other side were the Shoshonee, or Snake Indians, a most peaceable, well-disposed people, who intermarry largely with the Crows, and that this party were now on their way to 193 their own country, after wintering amidst their connexions. I did not therefore hesitate, and M. Vasquez had a good site fixed on for our camp when we got over, vouching we might dispense with watching while amongst them, as they made it a point of honour never to outrage hospitality by theft or outrage. They are a fine race of amiable men, good looking, and of good stature; but their women are not nearly equal to the Siouxs, yet there are, notwithstanding, more white trappers and half-castes married amongst them than any other

tribe in North America, probably owing to their peaceable habits and mild disposition. They have abundance of fine horses, and are good judges of horse-flesh, daring riders, and regular jockies in driving a trade. We had several offers of trade in the course of the evening, but confined our business to mocassins, of which they had a good supply, and better made than any we got. Seeing that our predilection lay that way, all the squaws went to work, and made a stock over night that would serve a regiment.

A lot of us spent the evening in M. Vasquez' quarters, who gave us minute details of the route to Fort Bridger, as by his advice we took that line to Salt Lake in preference to the Fort Hall, or northern route. He is a Frenchman, the partner of Mr. Bridger, in the fort, or trading-post, which they established many years since, making a large fortune, in bartering their baubles for skins and valuable furs. And now that they have achieved the object of their enterprise, they have contracted such a liking for life in the wilderness, to banish all desire of enjoying the luxuries their wealth 194 would procure them; contented and happy in the society of their unlettered neighbours, whose friendship and affections they possess. M. Vasquez met them here by accident, for he came on a speculation with a number of horses, hoping to find good customers in the emigrants, who he foresaw would stand in need of recruiting their teams after one thousand miles travel, and I have no doubt he made a good thing of it. We exchanged three of our most crippled nags, giving boot, which he was anxious to get in flour and coffee, but these we could not spare. He congratulated us on getting through the Crows unscathed, even with our full number, but designated it sheer madness to have attempted it only four strong. The United States government have made him a proposition to purchase the fort as a military station, to keep those savages in check, and I should think it will result in a bargain, as the Indians here can barely now get enough of skins for covering, much less for barter.

Next morning our cortége was an imposing one, for the Snakes packed up and accompanied us with their horses, and dogs, drawing their lodge-pole vehicles, their squaws slung round with pappooses, and the men mounted on their chargers, without any encumbrance but their arms or weapons. They appeared quite proud of our company, and gave us several proofs of their skill as marksmen and their surpassing horsemanship. As we went along, a young chief who had been practising with

my rifle, succeeded so well he became quite enamoured of it, offering everything he possessed in exchange. However I was disinclined to part with 195 it, until tempted by two superb horses that were worth a rack full of rifles. All Indians prefer the flint to the percussion-lock, for they can readily get flint that will answer the one, while the other may be perfectly useless from their inability to procure caps.

Our road was almost up-hill all day, but never so very steep as to require double teaming, nor so rough, as to convey a notion of the Rocky Mountains. We got into the mouth of the pass early in the afternoon, which, as I have already described it, is a wide, smooth slope, with scarcely a rock or stone on its surface. In some of the dips having a northern exposure, there were some faint vestiges of winter that another week would entirely obliterate; but digging to the depth of a few feet in wet spots, we came to a flag of ice as firm as a rock, which I think remains unthawed from season to season. After getting fairly on the top level of the Pass, the trail is level for better than a mile, when it yields with a gentle inclination to the Pacific springs, the first water that holds a westward course towards the great ocean they are called after. Here, with one accord, we halted, to gaze for the last time on the eastern hills and valleys of the Atlantic slope. I strained my eyes, looking abstractedly towards the eastern horizon for the spires and steeples of Sligo, and the familiar faces of my old acquaintances; and as they all appeared on the camera obscura of my imagination I felt a pleasurable sadness that for the instant wholly absorbed me; but I was soon brought to “a sense of my situation” by three lusty cheers, given as a sort of adieu to our friends before descending into the valley 196 of the Pacific,—an ebullition of kindliness and good feeling which I trust they duly appreciated.

We camped close to the springs on good pasture enough, with a few of the élite of the Snakes, the great bulk having gone on with all the camp equipage, diverging at a sharp angle in a northerly course. I gave the young chief a share of my couch, if only for the honour of being able to bequeath the proud boast, and leave it as “an heirloom in my family,” that I slept with a royal bedfellow, descended from an ancient line of Potentates, who, ruling by the code of nature, never have their dynasty disturbed by innovation or revolution. According to M. Vasquez we were here three hundred and twenty-five miles from Laramie, making our entire distance from Independence one

thousand and twenty-five miles—rather a formidable stretch to look back upon as having been compassed without roads or bridges, over mountains, rivers, and swamps—and as I reflected on the temper I remember often to have evinced during the rapid change of horses in a fast mail, or the short stop to water a locomotive, I enquired whether I could be the same individual who contentedly plodded beside the lazy wheels of a ponderous waggon for a period of sixty days. I would not have returned over the same track for any inducement, but the thousand miles in advance, like most mysteries or unseen wonders, were endowed with speculative charms conferring cheerful elasticity to the resolution, which made me regard them with curiosity rather than awe, notwithstanding the many disappointments the anticipative senses had already experienced.

We had a very severe frost in the night that caused 197 me to lie close to my august companion, and in the morning everything was locked in icy manacles. The Snakes did not appear to mind it, though our fingers were so numb with the cold we could hardly prepare breakfast. Some of our men, who had been complaining for a day or two, now fairly knocked under with the mountain fever—not a very dangerous malady—but in its way fully as racking and prostrating as sea-sickness. Two of them were so ill they conld not sit on horseback, so we made beds for then in the waggons. Though our trail lay over sandy wastes, dotted with artemesia, it was baked into a firm cake, and being slightly inclining downwards, made the draught light and easy. Our Snake friends having travelled with us ten or twelve miles, took their leave, dashing off in the direction their companions went the evening before. Soon after, a little more to the westward, we saw, as we thought, the effects of mirage, a parcel of detached elevated buttes of fanciful configuration, standing in towering grandeur, in the centre of a calm lake and far away to the south-east, a tall, conical bluff, also perfectly isolated, upraising its mitred head to the clouds. This and the buttes turned out to be real, the lake alone being imaginary, the glazed surface of the waste easily assuming that semblance.

We passed over several deep, dry ravines, through which the water floods take their course, and could see by their sides, where they were abruptly washed away, that there was no admixture of clay in the barren soil of the mountains; for at the depth of twenty feet it 198 was still fine packed sand. A few antelope were observed scampering amongst the artemesia, but we did not go in pursuit of them, camping at a whey-coloured stream, called Little Sandy , an affluent of Green River,

which receives the virgin tribute of the Pacific Springs. Near this is said to be a trail leading to Fort Hall, called, by trappers, Sublett's Cut-off, the discovery being attributed to a mountaineer of that name. The pasture was scant, confined to tufts of bunch grass, of a coarse and sapless character. I was somewhat disconcerted at finding a straggling band of musquitoes at this altitude; but the cold must have taken the venom out of their sting, for we suffered no torment from them beyond the blowing of their tiny horns; as to the sand-ticks, like many other nuisances, we learned to become indifferent to them, further than dislodging them from their strongholds in the mornings.

We nooned next day at Big Sandy, a largish river, running between very high and steep sandbanks, fringed in places with willow; it is also a tributary of Green River. Our route to it was an unvarying one of wild sage and sand, a disagreeable substitute for the rich brown heath and flowering heather which clothes our own mountain sides, and adorns them with its delicate bells of most beauteous floral organisation. I never met any heath in my rambles, nor, from inquiries, do I believe it exists, on the American continent. M. Vasquez said we would find a good camping stream between Big Sandy and Green River, but we travelled on till near midnight without happening to find it, 199 pulling up, after a long and fatiguing day's journey, on a bald hill side, without water or grass. However, as day broke we saw below us, at a distance of about two miles, a large river, which we knew must be Green River, the head water of the Rio Colorado, or Red River of the West, which pursues its unexplored course through the Great Basin, emptying into the northern end of the Gulf of California. We were soon in motion, to indemnify ourselves for a supperless night by a plentiful breakfast. But I must not omit mentioning rather a ludicrous incident that occurred last night in the dark, when Mr. D—q—e, to quiet the pinchings of hunger, thrust his hand into the jerked meat sack for a piece of dried beef, and pulled out what appeared to him a good junk, which, after gnawing and tugging at for a long time without getting any toothsome bits, he brought to the light in my tent to cut into strips better adapted for mastication, when, to his great dismay, he found that he had been tearing and chewing one of the old sweaty mocassins I purchased from the filty Pawnee, that, by some means or other, found its way amongst the meat—I strongly suspect by the agency of some mischievous wag, who did not think proper to reveal himself in the face of Mr. D—q—e's foaming vengeance, which was of a very threatening character, and alarmingly aggravated by the universal

laughter that followed the discovery. It was a standing joke afterwards, and no one ever ventured to taste jerked beef from thenceforward after sunset save by the light of a lamp.

200

CHAPTER XII.

The Ferrying of Green River—The Mode and Difficulty—The Hard Work swells our Invalid List —Dangerous Symptoms—Effects of the Mountain Fever—Extreme Heat—Bad Roads and Fatigue of Animals—Black's Fork of Green River—Scenery of the Wilderness—Fort Bridger—Purchase a Small Beef—Mr. Bridge's Kindness—Sage-Hens—The little Muddy—Waggon Accident—Visit from a small Party of Snakes—The Love of their Horses—Shaking Swamp—Another Waggon Accident—Bad River crossing—Drown a Mule—Crowd of Hills—Primitive Bridge—Fine Country —Shoot two Antelopes—Our old Tormentors—New Discovery—Slaughter of Rattle-Snakes— Midnight Indian Visit—Get into the Region of Snow—Slide down into a Narrow Valley—Great Anticipations of the Mormon City—Thunder Storm—Exciting Bear Hunt—Fright of the Animals —Distant View of the Mountains of the Salt Lake Valley—Romantic Scenery—Reflections—“The Jumping-off Place”—Unprecedented Déscent—Comparison of the Dangers of a Fox Chase with such driving—Description of the Mormon Canon—Mormon Lime-burners.

WE had at Green River, one of the longest and most trying jobs of the entire journey, there being no ferry, and the ford being altogether impracticable from the height of the waters, which rushed past with tremendous velocity, while the river was over 250 yards wide. In talking over the best and safest mode of crossing, some were in favour of a raft, others agreeing with me that it was only to be accomplished in a caulked waggon-bed; however, to prevent jealousy and grumbling, I allowed each section to take their own plan; and, 201 unloading and dismounting my waggon, commenced caulking it with strips of calico, and ends of lampwick, melting pitch and resin over the seams; paddles we had, and made a long steering oar from the limb of a Cotton-wood tree the others cut down for their raft. We were ready for sea by dinner time, and launched our bark, making her fast till we despatched that meal; however, notwithstanding all our pains, she made a good deal of water, which we strove to deal with, by stowing below the articles that suffered least damage

from wet, taking in only a moderate cargo for the first, casting off with two stout fellows at the paddles, and myself at the helm. But before we got properly at work, we were whirled round and round in the curling eddies, and hurried down with fearful rapidity. Still we continued to make a gradual offing as well as a great deal of water, and touched the opposite shore a long way down, in a waterlogged state. After unloading, we had a long and tough pull up stream, to a bend which we selected as our port of departure, homeward bound, and made rather a better landing than the other, but still very low down, involving another trying pull up. But as the paddling, discharging, and pulling up was too much for the ferrymen, instead of a cargo I made the next trip, carrying four hands for that duty on the other side. It took six trips to get over the contents of my waggon, together with the harness, wheels, hounds, axles, poles, and couplings, by which time we were completely knocked up, and the day spent; so leaving the four men beyond in charge, we devoted the 202 remainder of the evening to testing the raft, which, after a straining struggle in launching, had scarcely sufficient buoyancy to float itself, not to mention the utter impossibility of either guiding or tugging it up against the stream. However, as it cost such trouble, we resolved on making it subservient to some use, by lashing on it the wheels of the other three waggons, which of themselves had some floating properties, and could take no harm by being submerged. Next morning we started with it, in tow of the waggon-bed, the first trip, and I kept paying out a long line, when the stream was so heavy as to interfere with our progress, until I reached near shore, when I cast the balance of the coil to the men on the bank, who brought it up with great difficulty. It took sixteen other trips to get over the remainder of the loading and the rest of the company; and as there were only five men who could make even an attempt at paddling, the work fell very heavy on them.

Two of them were on the sick list before night, and a third (myself) felt very unwell. We got over the animals without accident, though five were swept down at least a mile; it occupied us till night remounting our waggons and repacking them. The following morning the two sick men were in high fever, and having no person amongst us who had even a smattering of medicine (perhaps a fortunate circumstance), I became very uneasy; bleeding was strongly urged, but I had recourse alone to low diet and cooling aperients, which produced so good an effect, that within three days

they 203 were convalescent; the men who were first attacked with mountain fever being now also able to sit on horseback, to make room for others who caught it. We travelled along the river for eight miles, when the trail diverged through the bluffs, and continued through a most sterile country all day, more barren and desolate than any we had yet entered. I felt very ill indeed, keeping upright on my horse with the greatest difficulty; suffering from headache, pains and weakness of the loins, together with general languor, and total loss of appetite, being frequently obliged to dismount and stretch a few moments on the ground to ease my back, all this under a blazing sun was not very agreeable. However, I had to bear it, as there was a sick man already in each waggon, and another would increase the load too much, for travelling as we were now in soft, deep sand, where an empty waggon was almost enough for a team, the middle of the day became so insufferably hot, that even the hardy Mexican mules, habituated to a sultry climate, began to flag, and the saddle-horses positively to reel from weakness. I therefore called a halt for a few hours in an artemesian scrub, where there was not a blade of grass; but even if there was the animals could not eat, they seemed to suffer so from fatigue and heat. Rest and shade was what they most wanted, and in a very short time after they were turned loose, they were nearly all lying down amongst the bushes, getting up lazily and reluctantly when we set about starting two hours subsequently.

We kept ploughing on through sage and sand all the 204 afternoon, until we reached what M. Vasquez laid down as Black's Fork of Green River, where we gathered some withered branches of artemesia for cooking supper, which very few seemed disposed to eat, all attributing their nausea and sickness to the exhalations of the ever present sage. I had the same idea myself, though I never heard of such consequences being attributed to it. We flushed this evening some large birds near our camp, which Mr. Bridger afterwards told us were sage-hens—very fleshy and palatable to those not labouring under the prejudices we were. The country from Black's Fork to Fort Bridger, is much of a piece with that of yesterday as to barrenness, but what with sandstone bluffs and buttes of fantastic configuration, the scenery was a little more diversified; in some places they rose quite perpendicularly, streaked with various shades and hues at the several strata. One very conspicuous butte, of immense proportions, stood apart from the rest, towering aloft like the dome of some mighty temple, which I felt a great inclination to visit, but I was so languid I had not energy to do

so, as it lay some miles aside from our path. We encamped to-night again without water, a privation peculiarly irksome to those affected with fever, whose parched palates and shrivelled lips betokened their sufferings; the sucking of a piece of linen rag soaked in vinegar being the only relief we could give them.

We reached the plain on which Fort Bridger stands early next day, and, as we emerged from the atmosphere of artemesia and got good water, together with the 205 luxury of a little milk for the invalids, we all felt a change for the better before evening, and were able to partake of a little supper. I cannot imagine how the term fort came to be applied to those trading stations, for they have no one point of resemblance to such a structure; Fort Bridger being even more completely destitute than the others of any such feature. It is simply composed of a few log huts, closely huddled together, without as much as a loop-hole to discharge a musket through. In one of those Mr. Bridger lives with his Indian wife, M. Vasquez' family occupied another, a third was a store, and the fourth contained a good forge and a rude carpenter's shop. We stopped a day to rest, from the beneficial effects the air seemed to have on the ailing men, and to make amends to the animals on the good pasture, for the poor fare they had since we left Green River. Mr. Bridger permitted us the use of his workshops to make some little repairs; our waggons required to have the tyres cut and tightened, but it was too much of a job in the absence of a regular mechanic, so we postponed it until we got to Salt Lake.

We purchased a small fat beef for twenty dollars, being very much in want of fresh meat now that we were so long out of the buffalo range, and enjoyed the luxury of some regular roast joints, having been given the use of the kitchen. Mr. Bridger, though not forty years of age, has had more experience as a mountaineer than any other dweller amongst them, as he not only traded with the Indians at the fort, but, taking a 206 pleasure himself in the sport of trapping, was in the habit of leaving his partner as the home manager, and spending a great deal of his time in roaming through the fastnesses of the wilderness, by which means he became intimate with every practicable route or locality that could be mentioned. He was excessively kind and patient with me in laying down the route to Salt Lake, taking the trouble, for my information and guidance, of drawing a chart, with charcoal on the door, of the country through which we were to travel, pointing out a new line that

had never yet been attempted, which would be a short cut of thirty miles; but, as we were travelling by waggons, he did not think it advisable we should run the risk of going over a wholly unbeaten track, though, he said, it might be safely undertaken with pack-mules; he estimated the distance from the South Pass to Fort Bridger, in round numbers, at 130 miles, which made us 1155 from Independence.

We left Fort Bridger early in the morning of the third day after our arrival, wonderfully recruited and recovered, and the animals as well, with a fresh stock of pluck and vigour. The hills immediately bounding the plain are thickly covered with fine cedar, whose rich, deep-green foliage, had a pleasing influence on the eye. Winding through its groves we gained the top, from which the land stretched away, without a dip or inclination, as if the plain below was an excavation rather than the sweep of an undulation. We soon again got into the regions of sage, which I believe, from the force of imagination, caused some of the 207 convalescents to relapse. One of the party shot a brace of sage-hens, which are as large as the ptarmigan of the Highlands of Scotland, resembling it precisely in appearance, save only the plumage, which is not nearly so light. Though not in season I should say, they were in fine condition, but tasted too strongly of the sage to be much relished under our present impressions, which left to the few who were uninfluenced by them, an ample feast, to which they did as ample justice.

We deferred our nooning beyond the usual hour, seeing indications of a valley ahead, where we hoped to strike a stream, called The Little Muddy, in the neighbourhood of which, Mr. Bridger said, we would find good grass. The descent was very steep, strewed over with loose round stones, which coming in contact with the locked wheels, often swayed round the waggons, to the imminent risk of their overturning. The plain below was richly covered with fine succulent grasses and beautiful flowers; large sycamores and cotton wood trees, standing in irregular rows along the river, which is most appropriately christened, its sludgy bed being composed of such adhesive stuff. We snapped two sets of traces in getting the waggons over. We did not travel long up it, crossing a bluff at right angles, precisely corresponding with the one we so lately descended, where we had an accident that disabled for the present a span of our best mules; one of the waggons, meeting a round stone on the pinch of a steep ascent, checked the team so badly, that they gave way, and, once getting a

downward impulse, it 208 could not stop until it came against the lead mules of the waggon next in order, knocking them down, and hurting them so badly, I at first thought they could not be brought on; but mules are tough, and so they limped on in the loose crowd, and in a few days were as brisk as bees again.

We had a visit at our camp this evening from a small party of Snakes, who brought some antelope meat for trade, and led along a couple of screws on which the crows (I don't mean the Crow Indians) had a mortgage, and served notice of foreclosure. We got the meat for a little powder, but declined entering into any negotiation for their used-up horses. One of them was riding a superb milk-white animal with flowing mane and tail, the beau ideal of a field-marshal's charger; but as I walked round admiring him, with the intention of making an offer, divining my intention, he shook his head, laughed, and galloped away, least I might tempt him to part with his noble favourite—stooping over his crest, and affectionately patting him on the neck with an attachment similar to that recorded of the Bedouin Arabs.

Soon after starting next morning we came to a swampy bottom that could not be crossed by a man with snow shoes, much less a loaded waggon; but as the trail went directly over it, and the craggy hills did not admit of any other exit, we set to work cutting brush and wattles, strewing them thickly on the surface to prevent the wheels cutting in. It answered admirably in this respect, but the small narrow hoofs of the mules 209 frequently slipped through, causing such excessive trouble and delay in extricating them that we hauled the three last over by hand a distance of half a mile, which took a quantity of brush that would make a pile as large as the Colosseum. We then ascended with vast toil, propping the wheels every ten yards, travelling along an elevated ridge, a good distance from which we went down by a sudden slant, where even the footing of the mules was very insecure, adopting the precaution of having four men on the upper side holding ropes made fast to the top of each waggon, to haul on if they threatened to overbalance; but, notwithstanding this, one of them took a sudden lurch, pulling the men off their balance, and went down the hill with a crash, smashing the bows, scattering the load, throwing down the mules, and breaking the harness in several places. It looked an irreparable wreck at first, but when all the fractures came to be examined, there were none of such a very serious nature as to cause abandonment. All hands

immediately commenced splicing and patching, and had it again in a sort of travelling trim in an hour.

We next got into a narrow but fertile valley, hemmed in with hills, through which Bear River flows, a belt of timber with a thick copse of blossoming shrubs, and beds of budding wild geranium marking its course. The banks were low and level on each side of it, but the current was very rapid, and the bottom composed of large round loose stones, which were slippery, and turned under the tread. The depth of water rendered it necessary to prop up the waggon-beds; and, to prevent the lead mules from swerving with the 210 stream, we attached a long rope to the cheeks of their bridles and passed it over with a horseman. Here again we had another vexatious accident on the crossing of the first waggon, the off-side mule in the middle span falling, and getting so tangled in the harness and trampled on by the others, she could not recover herself, and was drowned before we could render any assistance, which was difficult in the extreme, with a surging current up to the armpits. I got a severe bruise in extricating the dead mule, which made me lame for three weeks afterwards. It was impossible to get in a fresh mule, but we fastened a stout rope to the end of the pole, passing it out betwixt the leaders to the men on the bank, with whose assistance we got the rest of the way. Adopting the same plan with the other waggons, we kept up a lively motion that counteracted the effects of the flood, and enabled us to get them over with comparative despatch.

We travelled along the river for a few miles, and then passed through a deep defile into a brambly hollow, where the trail was almost entirely blinded and over-grown, but we tore our way through directly for a turn of the opposite rise, around which it was more plainly discernible. This brought us into a mob of hills, ascending and descending at perilous gradients, with barely fifty yards at a time of level pulling. They were verdant and grassy; and although we did not see any animals about, they looked as if they were fed over and cropped, the tips of the blades not being positively in the state that nature left them. After three hours' tossing amongst those ground-swells, we came into an open alluvial 211 valley, springy with thick herbage, like a Turkey carpet, and piebald from the beds of flowers and the wild flax, with its soft blue blossom. There was no going beyond this, so we unhitched alongside a narrow river, running slowly between high banks, which, on sounding, proved eight feet deep. While supper was preparing, the handiest of the party undertook to amend

the hurried cobbling of the morning, and I went to search for a shallow place for getting over. I did hit upon shoaler water than that at the camp, but still too deep to cross without soaking everything in the waggons, prop them up as we dared. In this dilemma I thought the safest and most judicious plan would be to pass the articles over by hand, and float the waggons across; and as a means of doing so, cut down two cotton-wood trees, and dragged them with a team of mules to a narrow, favourable spot, stretching them aside each other from bank to bank.

On this rude bridge we commenced at daylight carrying over; and working with a will, as the sailors term it, had the waggons across and reloaded while a person with a hesitation in his speech would be uttering the all-familiar name of Mr. John Robinson, more generally called Jack by a presuming public. We had a lovely forenoon's drive over a magnificent country swelling in graceful undulations, and robed in the most gorgeous garniture of nature, with herbage so close and deep in some places as to offer considerable obstruction to progress. In the course of the day we shot two antelope in prime order, their thighs shaking in masses of flesh like the cheeks of the fat boy in “Pickwick.” At a 212 seasonable hour in the evening we entered a pleasing green valley, circumscribed in breadth, but seemingly extending some miles with cedar-clad hills on each side, and a deep stream winding through it, like the inflections of a snake, from side to side, leaving no margin to get round, so that we were compelled to cross it at every bend. After doing so five times within an hour, once with great bother, we lit our fires for the night, and had a sumptuous feast on antelope-steak, the savoury odours of which, I suppose, brought a legion of our old tormentors about our ears, and they certainly made up for their absence by the vigour of their attacks. It was positively maddening; even the animals were moaning in agony under the infliction, rubbing up against each other, and scratching their jaws against their knees. I took some of the fat from the intestines of the antelopes and smeared my neck, face, and hands all over, which gave me a respite—an example that was quickly followed by the others with equally good effects. Under this unctuous veil we got sleep for some time, until the extremities of the prominent features became dried up by heat and drainage, when they were instantly invaded by a sanguinary host. I awoke in extreme torture, and found the heights along my nose, my chin, and cheekbones in possession of the enemy, who were also entrenched behind my eyebrows; but I dislodged them by a coup-de-main,

and threw up another curtain of grease that secured me from further annoyance till morning. The place abounded with rattlesnakes, too, of which we killed three in the evening, and five more in the morning, when catching up the animals.

213

The entire length of the valley, though not over five miles, occupied us till late noon, for we had to cross the stream no less than fifteen times in that distance; and as we got down towards the end it became very troublesome indeed, putting us to the bother of cutting tracks on each side for the going in and out, which, from the height of the banks and the narrowness of the stream, required to be carried back with a long slant, to guard against accidents. After crossing it the last time, we got into a dense willow scrub, through which it was very difficult to pass even on horseback, and at the mouth the valley became contracted betwixt a pair of great sandstone jaws, formed by lofty rugged cliffs, barely leaving room, with the nicest pilotage, for getting out between their base and the river edge. We now began to ascend a chain of hills that abutted against a very high mountain range covered with snow, over which our route lay, which we ascended slowly, in serpentine mazes, till we came to a small lake of clear, well-tasted water, with good grass, around which we took up our lodgings for the night; but were here again obliged to have recourse to the grease, else abandon our position to the musquitoes; the snakes were so exceedingly numerous, none of us felt inclined to sleep: even the men on guard were nervous, lest in trampling on one in the dark they should get bitten.

We were near having human blood shed during the night, for as the second watch came in to be relieved they found six Indians sitting round the embers of the fire, and would have shot at them, only 214 that they were in a range with the tents. The noise of the altercation awoke us all. They were given to understand that they ran a great risk by coming after dark, and were warned never again to venture near a pale-face camp in the night. But they seemed provokingly indifferent, not appearing the least concerned at their situation; and the more we sought to impress them with a sense of their danger, “the more they kept never mindin' us.” I am satisfied they made trial of this experiment to ascertain their chances in a predatory visit afterwards, though they had the pretext of a few untanned antelope skins for trade, which was only a cover; and though unwilling

to harbour any bad opinion of the Snakes, I believe they were of that tribe from the neighbourhood we were then in. We detained them till morning, and got them to travel with us for a few hours, endeavouring to get information from them respecting the easiest passes through the mountain peaks we were ascending.

The trail was admirably chosen, and turned up the steepest ascent with an easy inclination that would have done credit to the most civil engineer. The firm surface, too, without being so very smooth as to render footing uncertain, presented no obstacle whatever to the wheels, so that we got on capitally, reaching the summit of the snow ridges by four o'clock. From this we descended to a long spur jutting out in a westerly direction, and went along its edge or back for three or four miles, without any feeling of insecurity, for its sides, though steep, were thickly timbered, shutting 215 out the terrors of the view. From this we descended almost in a slide for near two miles into a wallel in valley, where the sun can never shine except at noon, so narrow is its compass and so steep its sides. We found plenty of cedar-stumps and branches that were washed down by the floods for our fires, and meadows of grass for the animals, with fine water to boot; so that we rested from our day's travel in high spirits, and chatted in mirthful anticipation of the fine times we would have in the city of the Mormons, which we hoped to reach the day after next, feasting on vegetables, milk, butter, and cheese, and charmed with the music of the ladies' sweet voices.

During the night we had a very severe thunderstorm, which for awhile I thought was going to annihilate us, as a vivid flash of lightning would shoot forth, pointing out where we were all ensconced, and then a peal of thunder would come rumbling down the pent-up glen, as if it would crush us under its wheels. It was very grand, I admit, but I always preferred reading of those sublime phenomena to looking on at the affair; for, although we had several very imposing reviews of celestial artillery since we set out, I some way or other succeeded in persuading myself that they were only firing blank cartridge, until the present occasion; however, we all providentially escaped, unless it were a spent ball that scored one of our mules along the thigh.

About dawn of day the guard, attracted by a noise amongst some cedars in our rear, caused by heavy 216 trampling and crackling of branches, ran down, supposing them to be pimping Indians;

but the sound ceased as they came abreast of it, when one of them ventured into the scrub to see what it was, and sung out, with all the strength of his lungs, “A bear!—a bear!” which soon brought us all to his side. We could not see him clearly in the grey light, but form the noise now and then we knew exactly where he was; so some went below, others above, and more in the open space, and kept closing up, the heights at his back being too steep to ascend. As we narrowed our circle, expecting to have him hemmed in in the centre, we saw the gentleman climbing, hand over hand, up amongst the stumps and brambles that grew from the side; but three or four shots, simultaneously fired at him, made him drop down, not in one fall, but in a rapid succession of descents from branch to branch; and thinking he was wounded, we spread ourselves out a little lest he should attack any too close to him. As soon as he got fairly down he looked fiercely around him for an instant, some blood being apparent on his right shoulder, and then charged determinedly up the glen, soon making a gap for his retreat, in which he was sheltered from aim by the trees and underbrush. We all gave chase and tongue, creating such a tumult in this lonely place as was never heard there since the flood, which caused him to break cover for the greater facilities of escape, running up the green lea where the animals were grazing, who, as soon as they saw him, snorted, brayed, and neighed, and, as 217 he approached, took to their heels, looking wildly over their shoulders every few yards as they galloped off before him; which prevented our firing, and our further pursuit as well, for in running down our game we might lose our animals. This was provoking enough, but ludicrous withal, as you would say if you were looking on. Shortly after we desisted Bruin again took into the scrub; and though the horses and mules abated their pace, and some stopped altogether, they kept looking round with uplifted heads at any little noise, making a fresh burst for a short distance. We had some trouble in getting up to and beyond them, and a great deal in getting them back, as every now and then they would draw up into a bunch, until they came opposite the spot where the bear disappeared, when they set off with frantic speed as far as the waggons, wheeling and caracolling for a quarter of an hour without stopping.

We travelled through the twists and sinuosities of the glen for six or seven miles, and at length reached an expansive hollow, that in Ireland would go by the name of “a punch-bowl,” but the one in question bore about the same proportion to the Milesian utensil as the continent does to the

island; the hills around it were both high and steep, and tried the mettle of the mules to the utmost, for they could not proceed over ten yards without a rest, two men being in readiness to block up the wheels, and two more to jump on the front spokes. By this intermitting process we got to the top after an hour and a half's hard tugging, where we took a good 218 breathing spell. About twenty-five miles in front, running nearly north and south, lay a long range of snow-covered mountains of unusual configuration, terminating in sharp edges and pointed peaks, which gave one the idea of minarets and spires, their sides being covered with gross timber close up to the verge of the snowy hoods that covered their heads. The space between them and us was made up of red clay hills, that ran up also into sharp points and edges, timbered the whole way to the top, and, in some instances, capped with snow. It was a scene of great grandeur and romantic sublimity, that tinged the admiration with a reverential awe, and led away contemplation from mundane reflections to a chastened, worshipful reverie on the glory and omnipotence of God.

I knew our trail intersected the mountains in a westerly course, still I could not see any split or open in their sides that looked like a pass or an indentation along the ridge that had a practicable look, and was obliged to leave the solution of the difficulty for the present, in accordance with the maxim in such cases, having besides quite enough to engage my undivided thought and attention; for we came to a brow, called by a wag “the jumping-off place,” where parachutes might be brought into requisition, the drop being so quick and so long that it appeared an undertaking of hopeless impossibility to get down in the ordinary way. Locking could produce only a trivial effect on such a declivity, where the flat waggon-beds, taken off the wheels altogether, would run down in a slide. I 219 therefore suggested the propriety of unloading and dismounting them; but one teamster, the man who met with the accident in Ash Hollow, volunteered to try it, if all hands assisted with ropes—assistance which, of course, was unanimously tendered—and he got into the saddle, with only the wheel-span, with a coolness and deliberation that only few men could muster in such circumstances. I was fearful, but kept my thoughts to myself, lest he should be daunted in the slightest where he required all nerve and self-possession. Talk of the dangers of a fox-chase and the perils of steeple-chasing—of which I have a tolerably accurate idea, having been in and out of the saddle in both pursuits—but they fade in my mind into utter insignificance in comparison

with those encountered by teamsters in such descents, with the mules sliding on their breeches, the driver's head right up in the waggon, which the stumble of an animal, the breaking of a rope or lock-chain, would precipitate upon him with fatal effect. What one successfully tried another was game for; so, after luckily getting the first to the bottom, a second was prepared to run the hazard also, —and the third,—and the fourth—all providentially succeeding in landing in safety, without the slightest accident of any sort.

The vale or glen was precisely the shape of a V, densely wooded, the trail lying along the bottom, which was rugged, from being torn up by the torrents at times, and at every hundred yards or so presented a barrier in a ponderous trunk or branch lying across it, 220 necessitating us to proceed slowly and with the greatest caution, all spare hands going in advance as pioneers, to endeavour to smooth the way somewhat. There was danger in every revolution of a wheel, and I fully made up my mind to a break-down before we got through. There were many more trying ascents and descents throughout the day, but the principal detention arose in rather an open place, where the seepage and drainage made a swamp that could only be crossed by making an artificial causeway, called, in the States, a corduroy road; so we had to cut down some couple score of slight pine, laying them closely together, and covering them with branches and brush; by which means we managed to get over in fear and trembling. Towards evening, as we thought of camping, some smoke was observed ahead, that we concluded issued from an Indian encampment, but on coming up we found it was caused by a party of Mormons, engaged in burning lime; a scarce and dear article, it seems, in their city.

221

CHAPTER XIII.

Gratification at meeting a White Man—Doubt our having come the whole way this Season—Exchange Tumblers of Brandy-Punch for Letters of Introduction—Our being mostly Foreigners ensured us a kinder reception—Meet more Mormons—A little Tobacco procures us a great desideratum—Emerge into open air—First View of the Salt Lake Valley—Its appearance—The City of the Mormons—Their Hospitality—Dancing Party—Polygamy and Platonism—

Fresh Meat, and in abundance—Any Price or anything for Coffee and Sugar—Neatness and convenience of Mormon Houses—Promise of an abundant Harvest—Wonders worked in so short a Settlement—Great quantity of Stock—Get all Repairs done—Natural hot Baths—The Temple—The Congregation—The Proceedings—The Sermon—Impressions of Mormon Godliness—Civil Government—Mormon Jealousy—The Population in the Valley—Extreme Heat of it—Swarms with Crickets—T. T. L. Visits—Amiability of the Ladies. I SHALL not soon forget the emotions which possessed me on seeing, so unexpectedly, the face of a strange white man, and they also seemed overcome by feelings of agreeable astonishment as we hastened towards each other with outstretched hands, greeting one another like old acquaintances. They were habited in buckskin suits, and had a weatherbeaten look, that showed they were familiar with exposure. It was a long time before we could convince them we came from the States that year; they thought we must have wintered at Laramie, and come on in the spring; but, amongst other means of assurance, an Independence paper, dated April 7th, removed their scepticism, while it augmented their 222 surprise, at our having accomplished so long and arduous a journey so early in the season. We gave them all the late news, and what was still more acceptable, a bowl of good coffee, which was then not to be had at Salt Lake; for which we got in return good news as to the wealth of California, and most agreeable intelligence touching the abundance of vegetables, butter, cheese, meat, &c., in the settlement. We spent a right jolly night round the fire of the kiln, having, in honour of the occasion, the first jorum of regular brandy-punch we had tasted since our start. The Mormons were in great spirits, and gave us lines and tokens of introduction to their friends and families in the city, which they said would insure us attention and hospitality.

We were still twelve miles from the mouth of the cañon, as they call it, but the road was considerably better than that we had already passed, as the Mormons come thus far for their timber and lime, and for their own convenience made it more travelable. Our reception was the more cordial from our being mostly all foreigners, and not obnoxious to the prejudice they naturally entertain against Americans, who destroyed their first city, and banished them to this remote location. They expected to have many of their little wants supplied from our waggons, for which

they were prepared either to give a liberal trade in any article they possessed, or a high price in gold dust, with which they were all well supplied.

After starting next morning we met five ox-waggons and a party of Mormons coming from the city for timber, who were likewise astonished at our expedition, 223 and evinced great anxiety to learn what we carried, as they conceived we came solely on a trading speculation, it was so much out of the direct line to California. We gave them some tobacco, of which they said they were in great need; a civility they reciprocated by giving us an introduction to some relatives of theirs who had just returned from California by the north end of Salt Lake, and would give us all particulars about the mines, and the nature of the new route first discovered by them from Salt Lake valley to that country, which alone was practicable for waggons. The drive through the remainder of the cañon was, as I said, comparatively easy and smooth, but far from agreeable. Within about a mile of the mouth it opened into a bosom, and then again contracted into a gullet, narrow, steep, and impending, through which we emerged again into the world of clear daylight and fresh air, the valley of the Great Salt Lake opening out before us as if we came through the portals of a gate.

Here again I was doomed to great disappointment, for instead of a charming valley, beautifully diversified with wood and water, there was a bald, level plain, extending over to the base of the Utah range on the other side, without bush or bramble to cast a shade from the scorching rays of a flaming sun, that blazed with twofold intensity, reflected by the lofty ranges by which the plain is bounded. Some miles to the north lay the Great Salt Lake, glistening in radiance like a sheet of crystals, in strange contrast with the dark and sombre Utah range that stretch along its western shores. At first the city was not visible, but on passing 224 over a piece of table-land, the new capital of the Mormons became revealed—not, I must admit, with any very striking effect, for it was too young as yet to boast the stately ornaments of spire and dome which first attract the eye of the anxious traveller. We saw from here with great distinctness the plan of the place, which had nothing novel or peculiar about it, laid out in very wide regular streets, radiating from a large space in the centre, where there appeared the basement and tall scaffolding-poles of an immense

building in progress of erection. The houses were far apart, each being allotted a space for gardens and enclosure, which caused it to cover a very large space of ground.

We were soon discovered coming down the slope, and as we entered the precincts of the town the inhabitants came to the front of their houses, but showed no disposition to open an acquaintance account, believing us to be an exclusively American caravan. So soon, however, as they were undeceived, they came about us in great numbers, enquiring what we had to dispose of. They were neat and well clad, their children tidy, the rosy glow of health and robustness mantling on the cheeks of all, while the softer tints of female loveliness prevailed to a degree that goes far to prove those “Latter-Day Saints” have very correct notions of angelic perfectability. We politely declined several courteous offers of gratuitous lodging, selecting our quarters in a luxuriant meadow at the north end of the city; but had not our tents well pitched when we had loads of presents—butter, milk, small cheeses, eggs, and vegetables, which we received reluctantly, not having any 225 equivalent returns to make, except in money, which they altogether declined; in fact, the only thing we had in superabundance were preserved apples and peaches, a portion of which we presented to one of the elders, who gave a delightful party in the evening, at which all our folk were present. We found a very large and joyous throng assembled; the house turned inside out to make more room on the occasion, with gaiety, unembarrassed by ceremony, animating the whole, making me almost fancy I was spending the evening amongst the crowded haunts of the old world, instead of a sequestered valley lying between the Utah and Timpanago mountains. After tea was served, There were the sounds of dancing feet Mingling with the tones of music sweet;

or, as Dermot Mac Fig would say, We shook a loose toe, While he humoured the bow;

keeping it up to a late hour, perfectly enraptured with the Mormon ladies, and Mormon hospitality.

I was not aware, before, that polygamy was sanctioned by their creed, beyond a species of etherial platonism which accorded to its especial saints chosen partners, called “spiritual wives;” but I now found that these, contrary to one's ordinary notions of spiritualism, give birth to cherubs and unfledged angels. When our party arrived, we were introduced to a staid, matronly-looking

lady as Mrs. ****; and as we proceeded up the room, to a blooming young creature, a fitting mother for a celestial progeny, as the other Mrs. ****, without any worldly or spiritual distinction whatsoever. At first 226 I thought it a misconception, but enquiry confirmed the fact of there being two mistresses in the same establishment, both with terrestrial habits and duties to perform, which I found afterwards to be the case in other instances, where the parties could lay no claim to any particular saintliness.

On Saturday morning we had a very early levee at our tents, with fresh milk, butter, fowls, and eggs, and a light waggon in attendance, with a side of beef, a carcase of mutton and a veal, all of superior quality; the latter articles for sale professionally, but certainly on most moderate terms, the prime joints not averaging over one penny per pound. The other matters we were forced to accept, and gave to the donors what we could afford of coffee, sugar, and tobacco, which were not to be had in the city for the last two months. In addition to those timely presents, we got all our washing done in the very best style of art. After breakfast we went out returning visits, and were most graciously received in every quarter. The houses are small, principally of brick, built up only as temporary abodes, until the more urgent and important matter of enclosure and cultivation are attended to; but I never saw anything to surpass the ingenuity of arrangement with which they are fitted up, and the scrupulous cleanliness with which they are kept. There were tradesmen and artisans of all descriptions, but no regular stores, or workshops, except forges. Still, from the shoeing of a waggon to the mending of a watch, there was no difficulty experienced in getting it done, as cheap and as well put out of hand as in any other city in America. Notwithstanding the 227 oppressive temperature, they were all hard at work at their trades, and abroad in the fields weeding, moulding, and irrigating; and it certainly speaks volumes for their energy and industry, to see the quantity of land they have fenced in, and the breadth under cultivation, considering the very short time since they had founded the settlement in 1847. There was ample promise of an abundant harvest, in magnificent crops of wheat, maize, potatoes, and every description of garden vegetable, all of which require irrigation, as there is little or no rain in this region, a Salt Lake shower being estimated at a drop to each inhabitant. They have numerous herds of the finest cattle, droves of excellent sheep, with horses and mules enough and to spare, but very few pigs, persons having them

being obliged to keep them chained, as the fences are not close enough to prevent them damaging the crops. However, they have legions of superior poultry, so that they live in the most plentiful manner possible. We exchanged and purchased some mules and horses on very favourable terms, knowing we would stand in need of strong teams in crossing the Sierra Nevada.

On Sunday morning early we went to the hot springs, a mile beyond the town, where the authorities were erecting a handsome and commodious building, and had a glorious bath, in sulphur water, at a temperature just as high as could be comfortably endured, drinking, too, of the stream as it gushed from the hill-side in a thick volume, being told it possessed certain medicinal properties of which we all stood in need. The Mormons make a boast of their good health, and attribute it to 228 bathing in those springs, many that I met declaring they came to the valley perfect cripples, and were restored to their health and agility by frequenting them.

After bathing, we dressed in our best attire, and prepared to attend the Mormon service, held for the present in the large space adjoining the intended temple, which is only just above the foundations, but will be a structure of stupendous proportions, and, if finished according to the plan, of surpassing elegance. I went early, and found a rostrum, in front of which there were rows of stools and chairs for the townfolk; those from the country, who arrived in great numbers in light waggons, sitting on chairs, took up their stations in their vehicles in the background, after unharnessing their horses. There was a very large and most respectable congregation; the ladies attired in rich and becoming costume, each with parasols; and I hope I may say, without any imputation of profanity, a more bewitching assemblage of the sex it has rarely been my lot to look upon. Before the religious ceremony commenced, five men mounted the rostrum, who were, as I learned, the weekly committee of inspection. The chairman read his general report of the prospects and proceedings of the colony, and then read a list of those deserving of particular commendation for their superior husbandry, the extent of their fencing, and other improvements, which was followed by the black list, enumerating the idle, slothful, and unimproving portion of the community, who were held up to reprobation, and threatened, in default of certain tasks allotted them being 229 finished at the next visit, to be deprived of their lots, and expelled the community. The reading of these lists produced an evident sensation, and, I am satisfied, stimulate

the industrious to extra exertion, and goad the lazy to work in self-defence. This over, another, “the gentleman in black,” got up, and, without any form of service or prefatory prayer, read aloud a text from the Book of Mormon, and commenced a sermon, or discourse, “de multis rebus et quibusdam aliis,” taking a fling at the various other religions, showing them up by invidious comparison with the creed of the valley. He then pointed out the way to arrive at Mormon sanctity, in which there was nothing objectionable as laid down, and exhorted the congregation, not only as they valued their salvation, but their crops, to so demean themselves, and endeavour to propitiate the favour and indulgence of the Supreme Being, calling to mind that, in the year of righteousness (last year) he sent seagulls, a bird never before known to visit the valley, to devour the crickets, who would otherwise, from their numbers, have annihilated all vegetation.* He then adverted to the barbarous treatment they received at the hands of the Americans, forgetting to avow his charitable forgiveness, and expressed a belief that their avarice would yet induce them to covet their possession in Salt Lake; but he entertained a hope that the Mormons by that 230 time would be strong enough to guard and maintain their rights and independence. He talked of the gold of California, which he said was discovered by Mormon energy, but they freely abandoned it to American cupidity, as they (the Mormons) did not desire such worldly aggrandisement.

It is surprising the Mormons, who are, as a class, a most astute and reasoning people, can be gulled and gammoned after this fashion, for seagulls are met all across the plains, and were seen in the valley the first time Colonel Fremont visited it, in 1845, two years before the Mormons thought of settling there.

With this ended the entire ceremony, and began a simultaneous series of greetings and salutations amongst town and country folk, which led to luncheons, and dinners, and all manner of civilities, and tender *tête-à-teêtes*, until evening, when another sermon was delivered, which ended the religious duties of the day. I can't say I was much impressed with the sanctity or sincerity of the preachers; nor did it appear to me, from the deportment of the congregation, that any very devotional feeling pervaded them; for with all the affected contempt for worldly wealth and pleasure, they appear to me to pursue the one with as active a zeal, and enjoy the other with as little restraint, as any other sect of professing religionists I have ever become acquainted with. The affairs of church and state here go strictly hand-in-hand, the elders of the church being the magistrates and functionaries in all civil and criminal matters, the framers of the law and chancellors of the

exchequer, with whom it is expected that every member of the community will lodge whatever wealth they may acquire beyond their immediate wants, taking treasury notes of acknowledgment. This the law strictly requires, on pain of expulsion and forfeiture; but I have heard several grumble at it; and I understand it 231 has led to numerous secessions, if not from the Mormon faith, at least from the Mormon valley, to get beyond Mormon authority. A Scotchman, fresh from the old country, who, with his sister, lately joined the sect, complained to me of the grievance, stating, that on his arrival he lodged a considerable sum with the treasurer, part of which he lately required to try his fortune in California, but was peremptorily refused, with a rebuke for his lust of gain. “He did na see whar this wud lead to, or how it wad end;” but notwithstanding his strong dialect, I question if he is clean bred Scotch, after so simple an act as he avowed himself guilty of.

There are no written laws amongst them; but trespasses, outrages, and such matters, are taken cognizance of by the elders, and adjudicated on summarily, according to conscience, fines and public flogging being the punishments most in vogue. The authorities have a mint, from which they issue gold coin only; it is plain, but massive, without any alloy. I only saw two amounts, 5 and 10 dollar-pieces, with the amount on one side and the date of issue on the other, without any emblem or device whatsoever. I got every information I believe they possessed relative to the new route to California; but to make assurance doubly sure, I was anxious to procure a guide who had travelled over the line, and engaged a man, with the consent and approval of my party. However, when it came to the ears of the rulers they forbade his leaving; for I believe they are apprehensive that the golden inducements of that rich country might empty the valley of its 232 population if they came to be particularly disseminated; a reason, too, why they deprecate the travelling of emigrants by their city, which they say (and, I believe, with truth) is two hundred miles of a round.

There are, as far as I could learn or judge, about 5000 inhabitants in the town, and 7000 more in the settlements, which extend forty miles each way—north to the Weber, and south towards Utah Lake. The valley, at its greatest width, is not over fifteen miles, and I think seven would be a fair average: its soil is a rich black loam, and is watered, besides the Jordan, which flows through its centre from Utah to Salt Lake, by innumerable springs of good water, and streamlets flowing from the snowy mountains; but it has a naked bleak look, for want of timber, which renders the effects of the sun

next thing to unbearable. The city is situated on the south-cast end of the lake, about nine miles from its shores; but I think a much more eligible site might have been chosen, where the land would have been equally fertile, the climate fully as salubrious, and timber, which they exclusively burn, much more convenient, for at present they have to bring it from twelve to fifteen miles over a bad road. The whole neighbourhood swarms with crickets of an enormous size, having a body as large as a mouse, and extraordinary long legs, which enable them to jump inconceivable distances; they do not, however, relish jumping over water; so that by making a small cut round the tillage fields, and letting water into it, those destructive insects are prevented marring industry—a 233 precaution that leaves the husbandman independent of the seagulls.

The evening of Sunday was glorious, after the broad red disk of the sun sunk behind the Utah range. A gentle breeze, wafted off the sparkling surface of the great Salt Lake, came down the valley with a deliciously refreshing effect, inviting abroad the inhabitants, who promenaded about our camp, and came into our tents to pay their farewell visits, as we intended starting in the morning. There was a large proportion of ladies amongst them, who appeared to reciprocate the admiration conceived for them by several members of our company; remaining till an advanced hour, reiterating their last fond words, the golden treasures of California being forgotten for the time in the lures of “metal more attractive;” and it even looked as if the charms of Mormonism, through the spells of its female votaries, was about to thin our ranks—bearing out the dramatist's remark, that, not as other emotions which require time to germinate and mature, “love, like a mushroom, springs up in a night.”

234

CHAPTER XIV.

Effects of the Tender Passion—Early Start—Boiling Springs—The Great Salt Lake—Its Appearance—Analysis of its Waters—Its Peculiarities—Comfort of the Mormon Agriculturists—The Cricket Nuisance—More Wives Spiritual and Temporal—Change our System of Travel—The Weber—Obliged to ferry over our Loads—Mr. Goodyear's Farm—Thick Jungle—The Ogden—Fine View—Heat of the Sun—Water before Gold—Fierce Insects—Signal Fires—Bear River—

Surprised to find Men in the act of launching a Boat—Musquitoes—Lose a Horse and Mule in the Ferry—Our Camp-ground—Take a more Westerly Course—Scarcity of Fresh Water—Salt Streams Hot and Cold side by side—Send out Scouts to look for Water—Their protracted Absence—Our Sufferings—Come to Water at last—Shoot an Indian—Lamentable Necessity for such Rigour—Last View of the Great Salt Lake—The Broad-axe Guard—Desolation and Solitude. THOUGH early astir next morning, there were those in the city whose wakeful eyelids anticipated the sun; and lest there should be a repetition of the melodramatic performances of yesterday evening, I got the waggons into motion at once, and moved off from the isolated metropolis of the Latter-Day Saints, deeply impressed with gratitude for their kindness and hospitality, with admiration for their energy and industry, but with no very elevated respect for their creed, or the ethical discipline of their social institutions. Our road passed along by the hot springs, where we had a regimental lavabo, performed in double quick. About four miles 235 beyond these there are boiling springs with the same mineral properties, but at a temperature that would answer for culinary purposes—a fact tested by one of our men, that he might be able to indulge in the boast hereafter, by putting in two eggs, which were cooked to a bubble in the usual time—three minutes by the sand-glass. There is a small river flowing from them, over which there is a bridge—for though it is shoal enough to drive through with ease, it would scald the animals if they went into it. Some of the loose ones that ran precipitately in turned quickly back, rushing with frightened haste over the bridge lest it should fall and let them into it again.

Here, with some others, I turned down to visit the lake, but could not well get as far as its waters, from the combined incrustations of muriate and carbonate of soda that covered the flat shores for a great distance from the edge, through which the horses sank nearly knee deep, and could not be induced to proceed. As the wind came off the lake it carried with it a mineral stench arising from the stagnant water close along the brink, which was offensive to the utmost degree; and, although the breeze was a brisk one, it scarcely ruffled the surface of the sluggish lake, the water, from its great specific gravity, being difficult to disturb, for, carrying in solution its full complement of salt, it requires a storm to set it in anything like commotion. Colonel Fremont, who analysed it, gives the following description and result:

“The Great Salt Lake has a very irregular outline, 236 greatly extended at times of melting snows. It is about seventy miles in length, ranging nearly north and south, in conformity to the range of mountains, and is remarkable for its predominance of salt. The whole lake waters seem thoroughly saturated with it, and every evaporation of water leaves salt behind. The rocky shores of the islands are whitened with spray, which leaves salt on everything it touches; and a covering like ice forms over the water, which the waves throw among the rocks. The shores of the lake in the dry season, when the waters recede, and especially on the south side, are whitened with incrustations of fine white salt, the shallow arms of the lake, at the same time, under a slight covering of shining water, presents beds of salt for miles, resembling softened ice, into which horses' feet sink above the fetlocks. Plants and bushes, blown by the wind upon those fields, are entirely encrusted with crystalised salt, more than an inch in thickness; upon this lake of salt the fresh water received, though great in quantity, has no perceptible effect. No fish or animal life of any kind is to be found in it, the *larvaeœ* on the shore being found to belong to winged insects. A geological examination of the bed and shores of this lake would be of the highest interest. Five gallons of water taken from it, in the month of September, and roughly evaporated, gave fourteen pints of salt, a part of which being subjected to analysis, gave the following proportions:

237

Chloride of sodium (common salt) 97 80 parts. Chloride of calcium 0 61 “ Chloride of magnesium 0 24 “ Sulphate of soda 0 23 “ Sulphate of lime 1 12 “ 100 00“ “

It has not been ever regularly explored or surveyed, and is variously stated to be from seventy to one hundred miles in length; but as far as I could judge, by the time it took me to round its northern extremity, I should be inclined to set it down at eighty, without a single tree or shrub to adorn its bleak shores for the entire length. There are several fertile islands on it, and one very large one, on which the Mormons told me they had as many as seven thousand head of oxen. Bear River and the Weber, which previously receives the waters of the Ogden, empty themselves into it, and although both at that point are large rivers, they produce scarcely any freshening effects, save at the point of disemboguement.

The range of mountains to the eastward of the valley inclined to eastward as we proceeded up it, the land to their base being of the most fertile character, settled by Mormons, who have fine herds, extensive tillage tracts, and comfortable homesteads. I called at many of them, and found them neat and commodious, well but plainly furnished, and the inhabitants civil, communicative, and obliging. The crickets are a serious nuisance, for the ground is alive with them; and they are not only destructive where they have their way, but the effluvia they emit is about as disgusting a sample of scent as any to be met with. Though they 238 burrow in the earth, they spend almost all their time on the surface, and delight in climbing up tall grass and weeds, uttering a grinding chirp that sets one's teeth on edge. They constitute the principal food of the Utah Indian, who eats them raw and roasted, and also make a sort of paste or jam, by broiling them to a cinder, then pounding them very fine, and mixing them with a wild fruit called service berries. A good many of the young Indians are domesticated as herds amongst the Mormons; but the wild ones are kept at arm's length, for they are great thieves, and not otherwise to be depended on. When the settlement was first founded they were excessively troublesome and dangerous, but the Mormons gave them a few grave lessons that improved their behaviour very much.

Our camp this evening was eighteen miles from the city, on the grounds of a man whom I recognised as a visitor when encamped there. He was particularly attentive, placing everything on his premises at our disposal. He had a snug and well-furnished cottage, and seemed to enjoy the greatest domestic beatitude in the society of his wives, spiritual and temporal; never, as he told me, coming in for any squalls, as the ladies expended all their foul air on each other. He had most thriving crops, which he and all the settlers up the valley manage to irrigate, without any trouble, by leading little ducts into their lands from the numerous rivulets that issue from the mountains. They have the advantage of having fine timber close at hand, and bushes scattered about that suffice as a shade for the cattle.

The heat of the weather now became so intense, I was 239 forced to alter the routine of our daily movements by breakfasting before the dawn, starting at the first light, and nooning from eleven till two o'clock, when those who felt so disposed might take a nap, allowing the animals to lie

by during the noonday glare, and travelling again, to an advanced hour in the evening, by which we made as long distances with infinitely less distress to both men and mules. Next morning we commenced our new system, though some, who eagerly acquiesced in it the evening before, turned out with a reluctant growl at the early summons. The country, in the early part of the day, was elevated and sandy, with a stock of crickets that made the animals stare with bewilderment, as if they were afraid to go amongst them. We happened to hit a very inviting spot at the nooning hour, and with all our abhorrence of the crickets, were all very soon, with the exception of the day-guard, stretched in unconscious slumbers amongst them. In our evening's drive, the country again resumed its fertile aspect, and was enlivened by the habitations of the scattered settlers; our trail then took a decided bend towards the mountain, in the direction of a belt of timber, which we conjectured skirted the Weber, which river we reached in good time, but were taken aback by seeing, from the lofty overhanging bank, it was both deep and rapid; there was, however, in one place, a low, gravelly island that we were enabled to get to without much trouble, and thence to the other bank was narrow enough to admit of having a permanent rope passed over and made fast at both sides, by which means we pulled across in a direct line, without nearly the 240 delay, or rather of paddling. My waggon was again dismounted, and we were not more than two hours getting everything over in the bed, except the other waggons, which, when empty, we hauled across with ropes. It was near eleven o'clock when we sat to supper, as fagged a lot of gentlemen as there was any use for.

We formed our camp at the end of a large marsh, close to the residence of Mr. Goodyear, a wealthy Mormon, who has an extensive breeding station there for stock of every description, amongst which he had the largest flock of goats I ever saw. His house, offices, stables, &c., &c., formed a large square of handsome and substantial log-buildings, and had every requisite and convenience for such an establishment, which is the last in the line of the northern settlement. He was preparing to drive a large caballada of horses and mules for the Californian market, with which he intended travelling himself in ten or twelve days; could he have started at an earlier period I would have been disposed to await his company, but we expected by that time to be at the source of Humboldt River.

We got a fresh supply of cheese and butter here, and a good mutton for every two waggons; but I rather suspect, when Mr. Goodyear arose the next morning, he was surprised to find we had

already started. Though early at work we did not advance much for some hours, the ground over which the trail lay being soft and swampy, with banks of thick jungle that had never before been penetrated, through which we had to force a passage. About eight miles from Mr. Goodyear's we crossed the Ogden, a nice clear stream, which takes its name from 241 the supposed murder of a celebrated trapper, who was said to have been murdered by the Indians and thrown into a hole in the mountain where it has its source. The trail now turned eastward, as if we had to cross the mountains; a supposition we the more readily entertained, as there appeared to be a cañon directly in front of us; but as we got up a pretty elevated slope, it turned again to the north-west, the cause of the sharp turn being, as we could now see, a tule marsh, that would not admit of crossing.

There was a splendid view from here of the Great Salt Lake, the plain, back towards the city, and away to the north-west in the course we were to follow. There was nothing picturesque in the plain itself: but the lofty mountains, with their hoary glistening peaks, piercing the soft blue azure vault of the heavens, whose canopy was unobscured by speck, or cloud, or film, had a soul-elevating effect on us poor pigmies, who crept along their mighty base, like ants beneath the side-wall of a stately edifice. The sun, so early as ten o'clock, was so fearfully hot that I could not bear my hand upon the rifle that was slung from the horn of the saddle; and soon after it became so intense that two men got suddenly ill, and had to be placed in the waggons, suffering, I suppose, from what is called the effects of a sun-stroke. This was by far the most sultry day we had yet, and it happened, unfortunately, that at the nooning hour we were miles remote from shade or water, struggling on in a gasping state for nearly two hours, until we came to a river, made up of mountain torrents, that descended directly from the snowy ridges, 242 hiding its cooling properties in a deep grove of oak and sycamore. Oh, it was a glad sight to see, more welcome at the moment by a million degrees than the richest mine in California: the eager mules could scarcely be restrained from drawing the waggons into it, and those that had their freedom drove down their heads as far as the eyes in the limpid current in their anxiety to swallow it. I admonished my companions as to the bad effects of drinking too freely at first; but they were deaf to every sound, insensible to every fear or feeling but that of parching thirst; drinking as long as the restrained breath would permit, and drinking again and again till they could hold no more. I was somewhat more peremptory with the sick men,

to whom I doled it out in small quantities, and with a happy effect. In the morning we expected to make Bear River at the crossing point; but the fatigues of yesterday evening, and the prostrating lassitude brought on by the morning's exposure, induced us to stop where we were.

There was here a genus of gigantic fly, which attacked the horses with a degree of ferocity that I did not conceive could belong to the insect race. It darted at them with a humming whizz, perforating the skin the moment they came in contact with it, as if their lance was inserted by the impetus, in some places letting out a perfect jet of blood. The poor brutes were driven off the feed in amongst the scrub, and some of them, in their pain and terror, ran furiously back the trail, giving us a long walk to recover them, which we would have gladly excused, if possible; but as the cool air of the evening set in those insect-monsters disappeared, and in 243 their stead came the infernal musquito, “to make night horrible.” We had, to be sure, discovered a sort of remedy against their attacks, but it was one that, like nauseous medicine, was resorted to with reluctance, and in this instance was peculiarly irksome; for, having expended all the antelope grease, we were forced to have recourse to our nice Mormon butter, spreading it over our warm faces instead of our hot rolls, which, fresh though it undoubtedly was, when reeking in combination with the animal exhalations created within the tents an oleagenous atmosphere that was not at all savoury, and thick enough to be cut with a blunt knife.

The watch throughout the night saw several fires at high elevations on the shelves of the mountains, along which we were travelling, and also on the Utah range opposite, which we knew proceeded from Indians, and looked like signal-fires betokening a gathering; but having heard nothing very unfavourable of the Utah tribe from the Mormons, I felt disposed to place them to the account of ordinary camping-fires: not so, however. The majority of the company insisted they were regular signal tokens answered all around, that showed preparations were making in concert to intercept and attack us. In consequence of my mistake about the Crows I did not combat the opinion, but took such steps as if the danger really impended, more particularly as it did not impede us an iota. We still continued our course along the base of the mountains, but got into a flat broken country, cut up with sloughs and half-dry channels, caused by the seasonal inundations, most of which were soft and sludgy, rendering our path so tortuous, that for 244 two hours we had not advanced over a

mile. When we did get on higher ground we could see the line indicating the course of Bear River, which we reached by noon; and on arriving at the edge of the high banks which look down upon the tule marshes that run along it, were astonished at seeing below a waggon with four yoke of oxen, and some white men in the act of returning from the other side in a boat. At first it puzzled us to think who they were, or where they could be from; but as I rode down to make enquiries, I had a most familiar salutation from one of them, who said, “I did not expect you before to-morrow evening.” I now saw they were from Salt Lake city, about to establish a ferry, in expectation that other sections of the emigration would follow our track; but their boat was a very small and frail one for that purpose. “How on earth will you be able to live here during the summer months?” I observed, seeing them tearing the musquitoes from their cheeks with both hands. “Well,” said the captain of the party, “they are *purty* damn bad here I admit, but when you get over yonder they'll give you particular h—ll.” Poor comfort thinks I, as they arose in shoals from the rushes, literally blinding us. I had not before seen them appear in such formidable force of a morning, and I would gladly have submitted to a round of fifty miles rather than undergo the infliction we were doomed to endure while employed in the tedious task of transporting our waggons and luggage, if there was any assurance we would thereby escape. We, however, went at it with that “do or die” determination with which fellows mount the ladders of 245 forlorn hope, and, as at the Weber, we got a fixed line across, though it was double the breadth; but, as the Mormon wherry was small, I had again to dismount my waggon to expedite the operation. The river was two hundred and fifty yards wide at the crossing, and both deep and swift; so much so, that in hauling on the rope it required great caution and management, lest the surging current should boil over and swamp us. We had the misfortune of losing a horse and a mule, drowned in the current, which occupied us three mortal hours before all was over; and I would venture to affirm, that if the great Bear himself, from whom the river derives its patronymic, were of our party, he would by that time have been scratching a sore head. For my part, I would run the risk of another bridge of Lodi, and face the thunders of artillery, sooner than again force the passage of Bear River before those infernal flying cossacks. It turned out, too, precisely as the Mormons said, for they were even worse when we got over, giving us an inkling of a certain tropical place of fashionable resort while reloading and hitching up for a fresh start.

We met at about five miles from the river a narrow deep stream, where we fixed our quarters, and were consoled for the want of wood by the absence of our enemy, there being no reedy margin for them to breed in. In the morning we fancied we had nothing to do but cross straight over—a very illusory idea, as it turned out seven feet deep; nor could we find a practicable spot, insignificant as it appeared, until after a detour of 246 four miles. We here took a more westerly course, receding from the mountains, and entering a country of gloomy grandeur, that looked as if its bleak solitudes had never before been invaded by man. We continued rising hills and sinking into hollows, like a small fleet riding over the swells of the boundless ocean, without any landmark in the horizon, crossing numerous river-beds, whose streams had been drank up by the insatiable sun; and when at length, in the evening, after a long and weary day's journey, without our accustomed noonday rest, we came to water, it was so brackish, it only served to aggravate thirst. There were two streams, within a few yards of each other, running parallel, one of which was near a boiling temperature, while the other was merely softened from the effects of the sun, though, strange to say, they both issued from the same hill-side. In the latter we all bathed, and derived some relief; but the animals were so overcome with thirst they would not feed, and seemed greatly inclined to wander, keeping us in a state of fret and fidget all night. We rather foolishly tried to make coffee, thinking it would disguise the saltish taste; though we should have known that evaporation in boiling would have made it all the stronger and more concentrated; but people, suffering, not unfrequently seek a temporary relief in a remedy which they know is sure to increase and prolong their misery. We all drank freely of this unpalatable beverage, and all, without an exception, suffered sadly throughout the night in consequence.

247

Shortly after midnight, there being tolerably good light, we set forward, hoping to find fresh water for breakfast. The trail was easy, but at daylight we were no better off than at our start. The men got very much disheartened, and I felt, too, uneasy and distressed, and sent out every horseman in quest of the simple but indispensable necessary, determined, no matter how remote from our route it might be discovered, to go to it. Eight o'clock came, and no horsemen returned; ten o'clock came, yet none were in view, and even the burning meridian arrived without a prospect of relief.

My eyeballs got sore from straining, for I never before watched with such nervous anxiety—they were moments of fearful suspense. At length a gleam of hope arose, as I saw two horsemen on the western heights. They must, I thought, surely have found water; but then their slow, dejected gait did not portend glad tidings. I raised my hat, and hailed them aloud. They saw and heard me, yet they neither made a motion nor quickened their pace. The truth was too sadly apparent—it was now approaching the limits of endurance. The teamsters sank listlessly in their saddle, whilst the fierce sun almost crackled in intensity, producing a reeling sensation and a dimness of vision, as if dissolution was supervening, when, like the noise in a dream, I thought I heard the sounds of horses approaching at speed, and making an effort to acquire my consciousness, saw Mr. H—y at hand to announce our merciful deliverance. He told us the water was yet four miles off; but the knowledge that it was 248 certainly there, and the slight relief we got from his canteen, revived and strengthened us.

It was past three o'clock when the waggons got up—rather a fashionable hour for breakfast; and although the water was cool and clear, it was not wholly free from a saline flavour; but from the fatigues and privations of the morning, and those of the previous night, it was arranged not to go any further for the day. About a mile below the camp, where the stream meandered through a level patch of land, we found excellent feed, a little inconvenient, it is true, for the guard, but the grass was too tempting to let that consideration weigh. Shortly after our meal was over, we were waited upon by ten visitors of the Utah tribe, dressed in buckskin suits, and well mounted. They had only a few skins for barter, and some of that compound I described before, made of powdered crickets and service berries, in small cakes baked in the sun. There were a couple of the horses I would have dealt for, but they were not disposed to part with them at all. One of them spoke and understood a little English, from the frequency of his visits to the Mormon city, and from him I sought some information as to the route to Humboldt River, of which he was entirely ignorant, as he said, “him lib here;” pointing away to the south-west.

As our animals were such a distance from the camp, and those gentlemen in the neighbourhood, it occured to me it would be a prudent arrangement to strengthen our guard; so at the next change I got my own tent carried down, and added two to each watch till 249 morning. Towards the

termination of the first one, the report of two shots announced that there were strangers about; and on going out I saw, in the moonlight, the men gathered round an object that proved to be one of our afternoon visitors, who, with others, in attempting to steal off a horse, received a rifle-ball in the knee-joint, which shattered and dislocated it in a shocking manner, the wound bleeding profusely. I made an effort to stop it, by applying a silk handkerchief as a tourniquet; but it produced little or no effect, though we twisted it with all our might with an iron ramrod, the poor Utah bearing it without a move or moan. I then sent up to the camp for some brandy, which I gave him diluted with water; but he sunk rapidly, and in an hour afterwards yielded up the ghost without a murmur. We all took a great interest in him, seeing him bear his misfortune so heroically. There was not one amongst us that would not have gladly given up the horse to ensure his recovery; but it is absolutely necessary to guard your animals with the greatest rigour; else you will in the end be deprived of the means of prosecuting your journey, and left to perish miserably in the wilderness.

Next morning we launched out once more upon desert of sage and sand, through which we travelled all the day, the bushes being so close and strong in many places as to call all our axes into requisition. It was very severe work on the mules, whose legs and bellies got scratched and torn by the stumps, which also arrested the wheels every moment. About five o'clock in the 250 evening a sheet of water appeared to the south, that was at first mistaken for mirage, but I found it by the glass to be the northernmost extremity of the great Salt Lake, now seen for the last time. We were well off for water all day, and camped in a flat, where we got a drink of the purest distillation. Here, together with bunch grass, there was a shrub like the savine plant mixed up with the artemesia, on which the horses browsed freely, which I afterwards learned is called greasewood. I kept the guard at its additional strength to-night, lest the Utahs should come to avenge the death of their fallen comrade, but the stillness of night did not suffer the slightest interruption.

The next day the scene of dreary desolation was broken by a chain of hills, running in detached and irregular lines from north-east to south-west; which were well timbered with cedar, aspen, and a large bushy shrub, bearing a red berry, the name of which I could not ascertain. We endeavoured to force our way through a valley that lay directly in the line we wanted to go, and again called out the broad-axe guard; however, after cutting a path for upwards of two miles, we met sage of such

prodigious growth, and in such close contact, we were compelled to desist, and retrace our steps to where we diverged from the trail, which led us in an oblique line up the side of the hills, crossing a grassy dell, where we halted till noon. In getting round to the other side, several short broken ranges of distant mountains came within view, all tending north and south, in conformity with the system of the great interior basin. 251 I did not before see so appalling a picture of awful desolation and utter solitude as that presented by the barren waste intervening betwixt the hills on which we were, and the mountains to the west. It had a scorched and withered aspect, that repulsed the eye and sickened the spirit, looking the territory exclusively created for the reptiles of animated nature, and forbidden to the footsteps of man. We descended alongside a small turbid stream, and followed its course till the hour of rest arrived: all the distance, the surface of the arid plain was encrusted with white saline efflorescences, and yet the water, as far as we could judge, was wholly free from any impregnation of it.

252

CHAPTER XV.

The Digger Indians—Their Appearance, Character, Habits, and Customs—Their extent of Territory —Their Practices towards Emigrants—Desert Country—The toil of the Animals—The 4th of July —Festival in the Wilderness—Occurrences of the Night—Fine Feed—Country again improves— Meet the Forst Hall Trail—Picturesque Scenery—Shoot a Black-tailed Deer—Different Treatment of Venison in those Hills from Ludgate-hill—Our Friend the Indian Dreader in fear—Goose Creek—The Wild Excitement—The Blank Disappointment—“All is not gold that glitters”—True Philosophy make our Disappointment Food for Fun—Further Researches—Volcanic indications —Narrow Pass—No Gold—Rugged Defile—Waggon Accident—“Necessity the Mother of Invention”—Sage Hens and Digger Indians—Their Flight—Apprehension of having gone astray —Snow-capped Mountains to cross—Infamous Road—Giddy Precipice—The Humboldt River —Strange Appearance of the Land near its head waters—Colonel Fremont's Description of the Humboldt River. WE were now entering the confines of the Digger Indian territory, the most degraded and debased of all the Indian race, the refuse and dregs of savage society, who receive into brotherhood every outcast from all the other tribes, that fly from the vengeance their crimes

have earned for them. In natural conformation the Digger Indian is very few degrees removed from the orang-outang; not much above its stature, having the same compressed physiognomy, a low forehead, with little or no space between the eyebrows and roots of the hair. He is altogether devoid of resources, possessing 253 little beyond the instinctive cunning of the monkey, without a scintilla of energy to procure either good food or raiment. They exist, as their name denotes, on roots dug from the earth, vermin, and crickets, although, with ordinary exertion, they could kill sufficient deer, antelope, and mountain sheep for sustentation, the skins of which would afford them a partial covering; but such is their inherent sloth, they have been known to die of absolute inanition rather than make an effort to obtain food. The females correspond in looks and habits with those “lords of the creation,” living in holes and dens, that cannot be dignified by the title of huts or wigwams, and drag out a miserable existence in a state of nature, amidst the most loathsome and disgusting squalor. Their territory covers a great, but, for the most part, barren expanse, extending over the Sierra Nevada into the northern extremity of Alta California. They are a terrible pest and nuisance to travellers and emigrants, for, without aspiring to the chivalry of robbers, they are content to fire their arrows at night amongst the animals, hoping to wound or cripple some, so that they will have to be left behind, when they become their prey. When going into their country, emigrants should make it a rule never to camp near shrubs or bushes, under cover of which they will be certain to crawl within range of the animals, and perhaps effect their purpose without being discovered, as no noise follows the discharge of their arrows, some of which may wound a man as well. Humboldt River and the head of the Sacramento are the places where they are most numerous; but they are fast dwindling 254 in numbers, for trappers and travellers shoot them down without hesitation or remorse wherever they meet them.

Next day the sun was oppressively hot, and we toiled through sage and sand without meeting an oasis in this cheerless region, while the animals were sadly persecuted by a large gnat, whose sting inflicted severe pain, judging from the manner in which the poor brutes winced. We had plenty of water, which, running without shade through those hot lands, was at a blood heat, and consequently not very agreeable to drink while sweltering ourselves in the solar fire. Two of the men, who rode forward in the morning, returned at four o'clock, with intelligence that there was good camping-

ground and feed about nine miles ahead, where we saw some hills rising from the plain; it was rather far, if it could have been avoided. I agreed, however, with myself to make it up to the animals by a later morning's start than usual. From the nature of the road, it was sundown when we arrived at our quarters, which fully bore out the representation given of them.

This evening happening to be the 3rd of July, the eve of the anniversary of American independence, our few Yankee companions expressed a desire of celebrating its advent, if we Britishers had no objection. On receiving an assurance to that effect, they concocted a bucket of capital punch, and as soon as twelve o'clock came round, those patriotic voyageurs hailed the festival with a peppery salvo of revolvers and rifles, and then sought to sap our loyalty through the insinuating agency of whisky-toddy, our boisterous hilarity imposing a new 255 and unusual task on the echoes, in the neat and appropriate sentiments, songs, and oratorical displays, wherein we were so desirous of saying complimentary things of each other's country, that it would have required an accurate judgment to discriminate betwixt John Bull and Jonathan, “[???]',” as Paddy would say, “the trifle of snuffle.” But while wetting our whistles, and rounding our periods, the reflection of a light at a distance on the hills directed our attention, and some of the lads being “a wee bit sprung,” insisted on going off to ascertain the cause. They were not over a half hour gone, when we heard a great shout—not of fear, but of fun—and could distinctly see the forms of our friends standing on a rock, in the glare of the fire that burned below. It seems they came unawares on a small encampment of Diggers, stretched round a large sage-bush fire, with a few squaws and pappooses; breaking in upon their slumbers with a wild hurra! that make the poor savages jump up in terror, and run off, leaving their interesting babies in the hands of the alarmists, who, instead of “slaughtering the innocents,” caught up the little dusky pusky beauties in their arms, and performed a set of nursery gymnastics that must have astonished their weak nerves, from the great heights to which they tossed them, to the tunes of “Yankee Doodle” and “God save the Queen,” to the great affright, no doubt, of their unhappy parents, who, I suppose, regarded the orgies as a preliminary step to the roasting and devouring of their tender veals.

The morning star made its appearance before we turned in; but this I did not so much mind, as it was 256 agreed not to start until the afternoon. Our mules got a regular blow out, and went to work

when called on with a contented acquiescence, that showed they appreciated the arrangement. The evening's jaunt, still over the regions of sage and sand, brought us to a fine range of green hills, on the side of which were sadlseveral antelope that were too fleet and watchful for our marksmen; the trail leading into a grassy ravine, wooded with gnarled cedar, that was twisted into most fantastic shapes by the rude storms that sweep through this gap in the winter seasons, we had a cool delicious spring to slake our thirst at, and not an unneighbourly insect to interrupt our enjoyments or repose. On getting through this the next morning, we struck the trail from Fort Hall, which, winding down a defile in a southerly trend, merged into ours just on the verge of a descent into an open valley, two miles in width, that separated us from another chain of hills higher than those we were leaving, whose summit lines were peaky, and more of the mountain character; they were also more thickly wooded, and though not elevated enough to reach the regions of snow, streamed with laughing, bubbling rivulets, that leaped wantonly down their sides from amidst clumps of aspen and cedar, ministering to the rich deep emerald hue of the valley, but at the same time making it so springy that our wheels cut into the soil up to the axles, so that we could not get through until we lightened the waggons, dismounting and packing whatever we could on the saddle-horses, and even then not without tremendous exertion.

As we got into the hills the scenery became very 257 picturesque, being delightfully wooded and broken into cliffs and lovely vistas, that often arrested us to gaze down those sequestered avenues of nature, across which we could see the coy black-tailed deer bounding into the break. We shot one of those fine animals in the course of the day, but had not sufficient patience to allow it the probation which Ludgate-hill venison is accorded by that veteran deer-stalker, Mr. Rich, for we had some of it hissing on the coals in a few hours after. We saw many signs of the Digger inhabitants, but were not favoured with a sight of any, though, from the character we got of them at Salt Lake, our friend D——, who still fondly cherished his horror of the children of the desert, spurred past every close grove as if he thought the trees would fall upon him, making it appear that in those particular places he had a misunderstanding with his horse. It took us about four hours to tread the mazes of those hills, from which we descended into the vale where Goose Creek has its rise, while all around,

north, south, east, and west, were a chaotic crowd of hills and mountains, thrown up in a tumult of confusion, like incidents and personages in the last chapter of a tedious novel.

We heard great things of Goose Creek, both at Fort Bridge and Salt Lake, and were resolved to search for some of the golden eggs, even though it caused us a delay of a few days. The creek widened as we travelled down it in a southerly course, receiving the offerings of little tributaries at every perch; the valley, too, opened somewhat, and spread out a carpet for our reception, with clover, rich grasses, and sweet-scented 258 flowers. Not many moments after we stopped I was startled by a loud huzza, soon followed by a multitude of huzzas, down at the river, which soon brought us all to the brink, without being able to get any other explanation of the unusual uproar but a repetition of huzzas and one cheer more for Goose Creek. “What under heaven do you mean?” I at length exclaimed. “Mean!” said he (huzza!)—“mean did you say? (huzza!)—why, nothing short of the gold itself (one cheer more for Goose Creek); look at it here on the bottom, and give us (another cheer for old Goose Creek).” I went forward amidst the uproar, and was well-nigh betrayed into a huzza on looking into the limpid water, seeing the bottom speckled with shining yellow particles, the very image of gold. “But all is not gold that glistens,” nor was it gold that glistened in the sands of Goose Creek, it being only deceptive mica that called forth the boisterous enthusiasm of my friends. I fancy I see at this moment their elongated jaws when the fact was ascertained; and if I could have taken a daguerreotype of the group, I know it would give the reader the most amusing page in the book; but, though sad the disappointment, it afforded fine food for fun, and kept us joking all the evening, with every now and then an ironical cheer for Goose Creek, almost as trying to the patience of the “ganders” (as they were christened) as the stings of the musquito itself.

The mistake, however, did not deter us from making other researches amongst the volcanic debris with which the hill-sides and ravines were strewed, without having our industry rewarded by a single grain. 259 About a mile from our camp the river cañoned at a right angle through a high hill, the sides of which you would think impended much beyond the perpendicular, leaving a side-path of rather a ticklish width to get through. On from this pass we got into an oval-shaped plain, which we crossed longitudinally together with the creek, and entered another defile, more roomy than the last, and volcanic throughout, cliffs thrown up in irregular strata and covered with scoria

and vitreous gravel. During our nooning spell all hands turned to with picks, shovels, and wash-basins, in the various gulches and ravines, and worked with great assiduity for two hours, without finding a spec, or meeting any of the concomitant symptoms of its existence, which satisfied us it would be a sheer waste of time to remain exploring in Goose Creek. We accordingly hitched up and continued our journey, still confined in the jaws of the defile, which became more and more rugged as we advanced, the torn-up beds of mountain torrents intersecting our narrow path in many places, shaking our waggons so dreadfully I expected at each jolt to hear an axletree snap, or see a wheel shivered; nor was it long until, in passing over a ledge of shelving rock, one of the wheel mules slipped, and falling broadside on the pole, snapped it across where it enters the hounds. Next after breaking a wheel this was the worst accident that could happen, as the fracture occurred at a place that did not admit of splicing: and the taking asunder of the hounds to get a new one in, together with the fitting of the irons, made it a troublesome occurrence, there being no one amongst the party 260 who had mechanical gifts or experience. But few men know what they can do till they try, and many thousands and hundreds of thousands have gone unnoticed and in poverty to their graves whose latent genius would have earned them wealth and distinction, if they had only met with any lucky accident of development. We all set to work, novices as we were, some to look after a suitable tree, some dismounting the irons from the broken pole, and others taking out the hounds. All was ready when the men returned with a nice length of white oak, which was soon lined, shaped, and rough fitted, plainly but firmly, with the irons, and fixed in its place in an inconceivably short space of time, and fitted so truly that the waggon, as it is termed, followed most accurately, making us all wonder at our own expertness.

We got out of the glen soon after, and continued our course, never anticipating any difficulty about finding a camping-ground; but it was deep twilight ere we met one, and then a very indifferent one, with bad water and worse grass, amidst groves of the odious artemesia, alive with lizards and sand-ticks.

The same character of frightful barrenness marked the country through which we passed the following day; neither flower, nor shrub, nor any indication of soil that would give promise that the energy of man would ever succeed in supplanting those rank weeds of nature by the smiling

productions of husbandry. As our loose mules were wandering through those bushes, looking for tufts of bunch-grass, they flushed a pack of sage-hens, which, after a short flight, were marked down. 261 We hastily loaded our guns with suitable shot, and in walking up to spring them again, I saw the bushes before me shaking, as if some good sized animals were stealing away, which caused me to quicken my pace to a smart double-quick, when I saw the dark back of something going from me. Without more ado, or taking any time to ascertain what it was, I fired, and, to my great surprise, up started a Digger Indian with a howl, and in an instant after fifteen or twenty others, all running like furies, and dropping their bows and arrows to facilitate their flight. We shouted as if in pursuit, and fired a few shots over their heads, which made them bound in an extraordinary and amusing manner, never slackening their speed until they vanished over the hill-side. They were evidently ensconced in cover, watching for a favourable opportunity, when we luckily discovered them, tickling their bustles with heavy duck-shot, but losing our other game by the occurrence.

Soon after a river appeared to the southward, which we concluded was Goose Creek, but it considerably puzzled us, finding it on our left hand. We approached it to noon, and, to our still greater surprise, found it running in an easterly course. As it was an affluent of the Humboldt, I began to fear we had overrun the source of that river, which was to be our great guide for three hundred miles; so, while the others were nooning, I took one of the idle mules and rode off to a chain of hills about five miles distant, through which it seemed to run. There I had the gratification of finding that, after passing them, it took a southerly 262 bend, and at a distance of a few miles sloped into a north-westerly course, which satisfied me we were still all right, though apparently on the wrong side; a misapprehension that was also removed, after we again got in motion, by crossing it at the bend where it took its easterly turn.

We were all the morning drawing close to a range of lofty mountains, composed of black basalt, conforming to the general law of the great basin, and lying north and south; many of their peaks were snow capped, and smoke issued from several high ledges, whence the Diggers might look down and watch us. Our trail went in a line to the base, and then ascended one of the hips, winding like a white tread till it disappeared round a knuckle at a great elevation. It was by far the roughest track we had yet met with, and was, in great part, made up of the bed of a mountain torrent, so

narrow in many places that the waggon-wheels were working upon the edges, and the mules endeavouring to pull below in the bottom. Being too much for a single team to master, we only took up two waggons at a time, using the teams of the four; and in getting round the projection took all out but the wheel-span, as it required the greatest caution and precision in driving, there not being six inches to spare from the edge of a dizzy precipice fully 1000 feet deep: it was a nerve-testing spot, and only one teamster was game to sit in the saddle, who piloted all in safety over the dangerous place. We had this grinning precipice disagreeably contiguous for more than a mile, till we got to the western side of the 263 range, from whence the valley of the Humboldt lay exposed to view, and, contrary to our expectations, was perfectly identical with the barren wastes we had lately been travelling over, except a narrow margin that runs along it like a shelf, marking, I should suppose, the high-water line when the river is augmented by the thaws from the adjacent mountains. Its course was perceptibly marked at a little distance down the valley by dense lines of willows.

It was high time for camping when we got down on the plain, which was pitted over for miles like a tan-yard, with oblong holes, some of which were very deep, of a remarkable appearance, looking as if they were formed by art, they were so equally spread and so uniformly shaped. All were deep and half-filled with stagnant water. As the dusk had set it, we did not choose to run any risk in getting to the river, but pitched our tents amongst them, and picked up as many withered willows as boiled our coffee. I may say we were now at the head waters of that remarkable river, though not exactly at its source, which consists of two inconsiderable little streams in the mountains from which we just descended. Colonel Fremont describes it as follows in his “Geographical Memoir of Upper California,” written by order of the U.S. Senate, as a key to his map, published in 1848, the first and only correct one of those regions:

“One of the most considerable rivers in the interior of the Great Basin is that called on the map Humboldt River, so called as a small mark of respect to the ‘Nestor of scientific travellers,' who has done so much 264 to illustrate North American geography without leaving his name on any of its remarkable features. It is a river long known to hunters, and sometimes sketched on maps under the name of Mary's River, but now, for the first time, laid down with any precision. It is a very peculiar stream, and has many of the characteristics of an Asiatic river—the Indus, for example,

though twice as long—rising in the mountains, and losing itself in a lake of its own, after a long and solitary course. It rises in two streams in the mountains west of the Great Salt Lake, which unite after some fifty miles, and bear westerly along the northern side of the Great Basin towards the Great Sierra Nevada, which it is destined never to reach, much less to pass. The mountains in which it rises are handsome in their outline, capped with snow the greater part of the year, clothed in places with grasss and wood, and abundant in water. The stream is a narrow line, with few affluents, losing by absorption and evaporation as it goes, and terminating in a marshy lake, with low shores, fringed with bulrushes, and whitened with saline incrustations. It has a moderate current, from two to six feet deep, in the dry seasons, and probably not fordable anywhere below the junction of the forks. During the time of the melting snows, when both lake and river are considerably enlarged, the country through which it passes (except its immediate valley or border) is a dry sandy plain, without wood, grass, or arable soil, from about 4700 feet at the forks to 4200 feet at the lake, above the level of the sea, winding amongst 265 broken ranges of mountains, and varying from a few miles to twenty in breadth. Its own immediate valley along the banks is a rich alluvion, beautifully covered with blue grass, herd grass, clover, and other nutritious grasses, and its course is marked through the plain by a line of willows and cotton-wood trees (the latter I did not see), serving for fuel. The Indians in the fall set fire to the grass, and destroy all trees, except in low ground near the river. The river possesses that which in the progress of events may give it both value and fame. It lies on the only line of travel to California, running nearly east and west; it furnishes a level, unobstructed road for nearly three hundred miles, and a continuous supply of the indispensable articles of water, wood, and grass. Its head is towards the Great Salt Lake, and consequently towards the Mormon settlement, which must become a point in the emigration to California and Lower Columbia. Its termination is within fifty miles of the Sierra Nevada. These properties give to this river a prospective value in future communications with the Pacific Ocean."

CHAPTER XVI.

Short Cut—Indian Surprise—My Retreat and Wound—The termination o the Chase—Motives of the Attack—The Dust Nuisance—A hungry Digger—His Gastronomic Performance—Its Effect

—Travelling in the Clouds—Heat of the Ground—Novel Appearance of the Country—Mountain Pass—Night Travelling in the Wilderness—Sublime Scenery—Moonlight—Sunrise—Opthalmia and Cracked Lips—The Sun, and its reflective Heat—The Water gets ill-tasted—Grand Canon—State of the Animals and our Lips—Wild Currants—Dogged by the Indians—Give them a Surprise—Amusing Retreat of the Diggers—Good Camping-Ground—Serious Difficulties of the Route—Deep Dust and intense Heat—Proposition—Lighten our Loads—Leave our Goods upon the Desert—Reduce the Burdens to seven hundred-weight per Waggon—Effects of the hot Sand on our Waggon-wheels—Green Goggles and Veils in request—More Currants—My Wound becomes very angry—Appoint a Deputy—Diverting Indian Water-hunt. IN the morning we had two hours twisting and turning before we got to the bank of the river, though for a day's travel it was scarcely important enough to be dignified by the title of river; but, once there, the path was tolerably smooth and level. After travelling down it for an hour it approximated, and ran parallel with, a high ridge of ground, which stretched away a long distance to the southward, and, turning round its point, ran up on the other side right opposite to that from which we set out. As soon as I ascertained this, by riding up the rise, I called to the waggons to halt until I selected an easy place to get them over, which would 267 be a saving of ten miles at least, and one accomplished without much difficulty, as all crossed over the hill with perfect ease. Feeling desirous that those emigrants behind should be made aware of the short cut—for even ten miles in so serious a journey is a matter of some moment—I got a bit of thin board, on which I pasted a piece of paper containing the requisite notification, and having nailed it to a short pole, went back to stick it up where we turned from the trail, taking with me a light spade to sink the hole, and rather imprudently leaving all my arms behind me. While thus engaged, I saw my horse, whom I had staked close by, raise his head suddenly with his ears pricked forward, and, turning round to ascertain the cause, discovered six mounted Indians coming down upon me full split, urging their horses more and more as soon as they saw I observed them, betraying by their anxiety and haste some sinister intention.

I was, as I said, wholly unarmed, the spade being rather an encumbrance than a weapon; so I saw my only chance of escape was in flight, and therefore, pulling up the stake in all haste, sprang upon my horse to run for it. Had I open ground I would not have feared the result; but amongst large

bushes their horses, from custom, could easily outrun mine. After the first burst I looked round, and saw they were fast gaining upon me; and just as I gained the summit of the rise two arrows whizzed close past me, a third taking effect in the thigh, high up near the hip. I was now within view of the waggons, but they were a long way off; 268 nevertheless, putting my finger in my mouth, I gave a shrill whistle, which it was clear did not reach them; then, letting go the spade, and taking a good hold of my horse by the head, I crammed in the spurs, rousing him to his utmost speed, and ventured to take another look round on my pursuers, to make a flying calculation of my remaining chances; but, lo! and behold, pursuers there were none—not an Indian within view, or any object I could magnify into the semblance of a foe. What could it have been? Was it a day-dream, or a vision, or the illusion of mirage? Yes, thought I, it must certainly have been the effects of that strange, deceptive phenomenon, becoming almost reconciled to the conviction, when I felt a prick of pain in my thigh which reminded me of the arrow that was sticking there—a circumstance that at once put an end to my preternatural speculations; for I never heard it alleged, by the most imaginative travellers, that those desert phantoms, Fata Morgana, are in the habit of shooting real *bonâ fide* arrows: they may terrify the senses, but they never go the length of wounding the body. It was clear, therefore, that it was flesh and blood Indians that chased me, who, as soon as they ascended the rise, and got a glance of the waggons, hauled off.

The arrow had only a shallow hold, and was not very painful; the only thing that gave me any uneasiness being the dread that the barb might have been poisoned. As soon as I came up with the waggons I got one of my companions to take it out; but he broke off 269 the point in the attempt, which subjected me to much more annoyance than the wound, for he had to make a large slit in the flesh before he could succeed in extricating it. It bled freely, which was a good thing in case of poison; and after washing it thoroughly, first with water and then with spirits, I bandaged it up and let it take its chance.

It is not usual with the Diggers to make an attack of such a nature, but I suppose they were prompted by motives of revenge for the peppering I gave one of them the day before, when following the sage-hens.

We had fine feed at noon close along the river banks; but although the road was level, it was most disagreeable, from the clouds of hot dust with which we were perpetually enveloped. It was not sand, but a fine impalpable powder, as light as ashes, that covered the trail; and, being perfectly imponderous, was raised up in clouds from the trampling of the animals, covering everything and everybody, actually choking the nostrils of the mules and horses, who appeared to suffer seriously from it, and giving some amongst us with susceptible lungs very teazing coughs. As soon as the cloud subsided, after stopping, we saw a squalid-looking Digger seated on the edge of the bank. I need not say that the first impulse was to blow him into the river; and, had he moved, such, I believe, would have been his fate; but he neither budged nor appeared in the least disconcerted. On the contrary, he "grinned most horribly" a species of smile, and welcomed us with a sort of bowing salutation. I showed him the arrow, and where I was wounded, making signs to him to warn his tribe to keep clear of 270 us, as we were resolved to shoot them without mercy on every occasion. When taking our lunch, he looked wistfully at us, and at length made signs that he was very empty and hungry, when one of the men threw him a biscuit, and another a cut of bacon, which he swallowed with such greedy voracity as to surprise us. We then gave him more and more, but all disappeared with the same unsatiable rapidity as if his abdomen was a bottomless bag that could never be filled. This stimulated our curiosity, and we continued giving him, just to see the full extent to which he could go. After making a clean finish of all the cooked meat, we gave him a greasy wedge off a raw flitch of bacon, which he attacked with unflagging appetite; but before he fully mastered it, he showed symptoms of choke, and sank back in a kind of swoon, his stomach braced out with a pregnant rotundity that threatened an explosion, as he moaned and rolled as in apparent agony. I began to fear the unfortunate creature had eaten himself to death, and that we had wasted a great quantity of food in a most reprehensible manner. However, before we were ready for a fresh start he recovered a little, and after a great effort managed to get on his legs, and toddled off in a slow, but awkward gait, sitting down every fifty or eighty yards, like a fellow resting under a heavy load.

We moved off in a cloud, which rolled faithfully along with us the entire evening, and at times was so impenetrable it was next thing to impossible to see our way, coming at every second waggon

length jam into a big sage-bush, and the heads of the mules in the rear coming bump against the obstructed wággon. We 271 followed the river through an open cañon, in a low range of detached mountains, and camped on the other side, our couches not requiring the precaution of warming-pans, for the ground was almost hot enough to bake biscuit.

Next morning we got into a flat valley, shaped like a Y, coated all over with a thin saline incrustation, and all the bushes frosted with a hoar-powder, that gave it exactly the appearance of deep winter drapery, while the sun was toasting everything to a cinder. When we came to the tail of the valley the river left us in a southerly sweep, and cañoned through the mountains in a very narrow precipitous channel, our trail slanting northerly over the brow. We took our nooning spell before we commenced the ascent, and prepared a lot of logs to key or prop the wheels at the rests. Though the range was steep it looked narrow, so that we calculated we could easily accomplish the crossing in the evening, lightening as much as we could by packing; nevertheless, it was a task of infinite toil to both man and beast to gain the top of the first elevation; on attaining which, far from having surmounted all difficulties, we had to slide down with ropes and double-locks into a rocky defile, where we kept jumbling and jolting until dark, and took two hours of moonlight before we got to the end of it, where we were met by another steep and rugged ascent.

I would have been inclined to stop here till daylight if there was any grass or brambles on which the animals could browse; but there was nothing save bare rocks and stones. It was on the borders of twelve o'clock 272 when we got to the top of the other ridge, the moon shining out with glorious effulgence in the midst of a starry host that studded the clear blue firmament, forming a radiant canopy, not frequently beheld along the humid shores of the Atlantic, while its rays were reflected by the white crystal-covered plain below that lay spread out like the vast winding-sheet of a dead world at the base of the lofty peaks, which cast their sombre shadows across the crooked river, resembling the mighty mausoleums of an extinct race of giants, standing in silence and solitude in this unfrequented region, making a truly sublime scene, mellowed by the time and the circumstances under which it was surveyed. It took us some time to crawl down the mountain hips, the beams of the morning sun shedding their light beyond the range we had just crossed, before we formed our camp; and as we reposed in the shadow at its base, it was a gorgeous spectacle to

look out upon the sparkling desert, as it became gradually tinged with the rich red hues of morning, deepening momentarily in colour, until it seemed at length to dissolve into an ocean of liquid vermilion.

We had a late breakfast this morning, and did not get “a rollin” until nine o'clock. There was no novelty in the appearance of the country—sterile and barren as usual, and the dust as smothering, several of our company showing symptoms of opthalmia, and all suffering from hacked lips. Little ulcers were also observable in some of the horses' noses, which alarmed me very seriously lest they should become aggravated into glanders; but I found they healed up by being 273 frequently washed in a weak solution of alum. Portions of the plain we crossed to-day were composed of an earth almost as white as chalk, and baked so hard that neither the horses' hoofs nor the waggon-wheels made the slightest indentation on it. But the beams of the burning sun were reflected from its polished surface with a roasting intensity that almost dried up the sources of existence, for what with a fire above and a red heat below, without a zephyr to cool the fevered lungs, or temper down the blood in its arterial manufacture, I feared some would surely sink under it. What would we not give for a wide-spreading lime to nestle for a little within its delicious shade; but there was not a twig where we nooned on the river bank, while, to add to our miseries, we now detected an acrid taste in the water, which smarted our cracked lips most terribly, it being evidently strongly impregnated with alkali.

We derived very little benefit or enjoyment from our rest, and had another sharp evening's task before us, in the crossing of another bench of mountains, which were not very elevated; but what they lacked in height they made up in breadth and other difficulties, for the ravine through which the pass lay was filled with loose sand, in which the wheels sank eighteen inches. The river cañoned here again in a southerly direction, and so closely to us I had the curiosity to visit it. There was a space at each edge where it first entered the mountain, but as it got towards the centre it washed the very walls of the precipice on each side, the aperture above looking like a mere slit, not large enough to let down sufficient light, for the chasm through which the waters 274 hurried was as dark as Erebus within. We got to our camping-ground this evening in better time, but both men and animals were enervated and weakened by the sultriness of the day, and all as white as millers from

the fine dust. Those complaining of sore eyes were now very bad, as well as those with delicate lungs, and our lips, I must say, were in a very unkissable condition. The river water was so bad this evening, that, wearied as we were we dug a well, into which the water came plentifully through a porous soil; but of the two it tasted worse than the other, being even very disagreeably perceptible in coffee, and only usable cold with any relish by an admixture of cream of tartar.

Next day we travelled almost without deviation close by the river bank, but could in many places have made a more direct course than by following its bends, only that the artemesia was altogether impenetrable. In spots during the day we met bushes of wild currant, small and tart, and from that very constituent, being a good antiscorbutic, I recommended each mess to pull as many as would make a good pie, which we found palatable as well as wholesome. A lot of Indians kept dogging us all the morning, and the river being deeply fringed with willows, it was clear they purposed following us till evening, to see and get a shot at our stock; but we managed to disperse them in great alarm, by leaving six men in a dry gully at a point of the river round which we went, taking a southerly slant, knowing that, if bent on mischief, they would pass very close to this angle. About half a mile further on six more men dropped down quietly in the tall sage, the waggons and 275 horsemen going on without any pause. Just as we anticipated, the Diggers, about thirty strong, shaved the point, without perceiving the men in their rear, and as soon as they got midway betwixt both parties, each arose, charging them at a run, shouting and roaring lustily, and firing a few shots over their heads. Oh, it was a scene worth going a distance—but not the whole distance—to see the frightened savages running as if their lives were at stake; jumping frantically in the air at each report, and clapping their hands on the spot, in anything but a derisive mood, as they got some grains of heavy shot in a certain quarter. We continued the pursuit until we were positively overcome with laughter; whenever we saw them slackening their pace in the least, accelerating it again into full speed by a discharge from a rifle in the air.

We arrived early in the evening, and a lovely one it was, at an elbow of the river, where there was the finest feed we met for some weeks—rich grasses, thickly interspersed with clover. Influenced by this temptation, as well as a desire to give the *chefs de cuisine* fair time to get their confectionery in a state of perfectability, I consented to a stop for the night; but as we were

regularly circumvented by willows, the remainder set about scouring the brush, to see if there were any lurking Diggers, that we might serve them with latitats: none being found, we sat down to a *recherché* supper, all things considered; but our sore lips, inflamed eyes, and irritated lungs, were a sad drawback to our enjoyment of it.

276

The work next morning was harassing, getting through broken ground, where the loose sand was so very deep the wheels sank almost to the naves, the poor mules panting and struggling knee-deep in it, while at a heat that would roast eggs. In one hollow it became so bad, that our best team gave out, refusing to move one inch; we therefore caught all the loose animals, and packed them together with the riding horses; but even then we were obliged to double team for over a mile, coming back for the other waggons, which caused considerable delay; and as the draught animals were so jaded, I left on the packs until we came to our camping-ground, turning in my mind for immediate proposition a project I foresaw would be forced upon us, sooner or later, and, being inevitable, I thought it better to anticipate it. So, when we halted, I called the general attention to the condition of our animals, reminding them of the distance we had still to travel, and the fact that, within that distance, lay the two prime obstacles of the entire journey—the crossing of the Desert, beyond the Sink of Humboldt River, and the Great Sierra Nevada, which, as they were aware, could only be surmounted by teams quite up to the mark. I therefore called upon each, not only as he valued the stock but his own life, to consent to have the loads revised, and everything cast aside that was not absolutely indispensable, clothing as well as food. This, I must do them the justice to say, they cheerfully acquiesced in, agreeing to appoint a man out of each mess as a committee of inspection, who were 277 to decide and apportion the load of each, what was to be carried and what was to be rejected, I, as captain, being accorded a casting voice.

It was computed we left Independence with 22 cwt. each, which it now was supposed had been reduced to 12 cwt. Of this, on a patient revision, and calculating the number of days the journey would yet occupy, allowing ample rations for that period, and for a fortnight after our arrival, to give us breathing time to look about, we came to the conclusion that 5 cwt. from each might be thrown away; for, together with a superabundance of provisions, we had many useless superfluities

in the way of dress, ammunition, &c., &c., which could be easily replaced in California. To begin, we went through the bacon, culling the worst, and weighing 1 cwt. from each waggon, together with 1 cwt. of flour, and a proportion of biscuit, dried peas, beans, and raw coffee, of which we made up half the complement, completing it with powder, lead, shot—of which we had a most inordinate quantity—boxes with extra tools, and a set of lumbering gold-washers, that were very ponderous, and took up a quantity of room. We weighed all accurately with steelyards, leaving to each, as nearly as we could adjust it, 7 cwt., everything inclusive. The bacon, flour, &c., &c., we packed in a nice heap, strewed over with willows and rushes to protect it from decay, in case any emigrants not so amply provided as we were should require them; but the powder, lead, and shot we hove into the river, lest they should fall into the hands of the Indians, and prove 278 a source of annoyance and destruction to those who might follow us.

Seven cwt. was a handy, portable load one would imagine, and easily managed with six mules; but they were so enfeebled by unremitting daily harass, hot sands, sultry weather, and precarious food, that they moved it along with a greater effort than the 22 cwt. at starting. We calculated, also, that the revised loads would be still further reduced by 2 cwt. when we reached the base of the Great Sierra Nevada, which, if need arose, could be altogether carried on the loose and riding animals in packs, making out rather a favourable case for crossing that formidable range. There was a another matter that gave us not a little uneasiness: it was the state of our wheels: for since we began coming down Humboldt River, being constantly immersed in hot sand, the felloes and naves shrunk, the tyres loosened, and the spokes rattled like a bag of bones; but we resolved to manage by wedging until we got to the Sink, where we intended submerging them in water, to swell them out, before attempting the Desert, as we could not possibly devise any mode of cutting and welding the tyres.

The business of arranging our loads fully occupied us during our three nooning hours, but afforded us all infinite gratification to feel we had been easing our faithful animals of a large portion of their burdens, and that, too, without obliging ourselves to forego a single necessary that we were accustomed to use since we started. During our afternoon's drive we were not 279 so much retarded with deep sand, but the light dust was, if possible, more annoying than ever. There happened to be a few pair of green goggles amongst the party, which were given to those suffering most from

opthalmia; and those afflicted with coughs wore a sort of mouth veil, made of some scraps of cambric we fished up in our finery. We were fortunate enough, in the course of the afternoon, to fall in with a perfect orchard of wild currants, and pulled a most plentiful supply, of a much better description than those we got before, which called to mind Jeremy Diddler's celebrated apostrophe, “Be of good cheer, oh, ye clamorous bowels!”

The exertion of lifting and weighing had an evil effect on my wound, which now began paining me excessively, assuming so angry a look that I was yet apprehensive of poison, though the heat, the constant exercise, and the bad tone of system, were of themselves reason enough for the inflammation. I rode with great difficulty, but looked forward to some relief from the suppuration that was fast forming, aided by fomentation as often as opportunity offered. Being unable to move about as usual, I appointed a deputy *pro tem*. to look after camping-grounds, &c., &c., to whom I generously yielded up all the large emoluments of the office. He located us this evening in very good quarters, as far as grass and water were concerned; but there was a forest of willows that left me very ill at ease as to the safety of the stock, and the men were so fagged they were too lazy to go about searching through it for Diggers.

However, after supper, seeing some tall willows 280 moving, without a breath of air to cause it, as no volunteers offered, I caused all the shot guns to be loaded up with heavy duck, and fired into the thickest places, not with a view of killing any skulkers, but to frighten them from their lairs. The shot made a great rustle, cutting through the crisp leaves and withered branches, producing no effect at first; but after two or three discharges the willows began to shake and shake more violently; on seeing which we raised a wild halloo, and fired a volley in quick succession, some darting into the scrub, which was now shaking like a barley-field in a stiff breeze. Presently a plop was heard in the water; and then another, followed by a succession of plop, plop, plop, plops, caused by the Indians jumping into the river to gain the other side, affording us an exhibition of equatic feats, in ducking and diving, that would draw crowds to the Cremorne Gardens; for being afraid to go out on the opposite bank, as the river was so narrow, they kept diving down stream, followed by us on the banks, saluting them with shots the moment they popped their heads over water, exactly after the fashion of a water-rat hunt in a mill-race, until we saw the poor devils were fairly exhausted,

when we drew back, and let them get out as they listed. I think the lesson prevented the same party from making any further predatory attempts during the season; and I know, if only ordinary caution is used, safety would not only be insured, but those wretched savages be altogether cured of their annoying habits.

281

CHAPTER XVII.

Another Surgical Operation—Obliged to take up my abode in a Waggon—Time for Reflection—A Waggon Dream—Volcanic Indications—Spectral Waltzes—Shoot some Sage-Hens—Bitter bad Water—Get into the Saddle again—Petrified Fungi and Volcanic Debris—Appalling Sterility—Diminution of the River—Thickness of the Water—The Ashy Dust—Miss Mitford's definition of it—Opthalmia in the Horses—Alluvial Bottom—Milage in the Wilderness—Deceived as to the-Sink—Frigidum Line—Ulcerated Sore-Throats—Appearance of the Animals— Meagre Diet—Crippled Appearance of the Caravan—Magical influence of golden Anticipations—Pimping Indians—Mowing with Case-Knives—Diggers come amongst us unawares—No Hostility—Get them to Work—Their Mode of wearing English Apparel—Make our Hay into Trusses, and divide it—Volcanic Evidences—The Sink of Humboldt River—Description of it—Order of Travel across the Desert—Reflections on the Sufferings of those who will come later in the Season—Account of their dire Character—Humboldt River free from the Musquito Torment. I AROSE from my bivouac next morning in such pain, that I resolved anticipating the breaking of the tumour by lancing, and got one of my friends to perform the surgical operation by puncturing it deeply with a sharp knife. The discharge was immense, and the relief immediate; but my professional attendant strictly interdicted riding, and got a bed fixed for me in my waggon, which gives me an excuse for abbreviating my account of this day's travel, though, from what I could 282 see through the clouds, it did not differ in any respect from that which we passed since we struck the river.

It gave me leisure for multifarious reflections touching the past, present, and the future. Poverty-stricken Ireland, without a potatoe to dig—Humboldt River, with its mischievous Diggers—and wealthy California, with its golden diggins; and I thought, as I dozed off into a slumber, that I was

in the valley of the Sacramento, with a legion of the “hereditary bondsmen,” who were “tossin' up the yallow clay,” as they called it, on the points of their spades, shouting, “Hurrah, my boys! the working-man's summer is come at last; we can get gold now, when the lords and squires are unable to reach it; the wheel has gone its round; bone and sinew now beat titles and professions; maybe we won't pay off our score of the nashunal debt, and repale the Union, and set up for ourselves in raal earnist, in ould Ireland, with the sky over it:” and as they amassed their piles of treasure, they would at times pull off a stocking, and filling it with dust (not the dirty macadamized trash), tie it to the tail of a runaway steam-engine just going to start for Carricknagat and Drumiscabole, to leave it with Peggy and the childher, and a trifle for poor Master John, to help him over the bad times, though he used to “pound the cattle for the rint.” And while they were thus employed, a tall, gaunt, whey-coloured chap, with a broad-brimmed hat, and epitomised inexpressibles, stalked into the midst of them, and said:

“I reckon that ar gold is none o'yourn.”

“I reckon your mother rayred you in a hard summer, ould Paywattle,” said Paddy Burke.

“Mind, friend, if you realise what don't belong to you, you must pay our free and enlightened government thirty dollars a month—that's a fact.”

“Send a sweep,” says Paddy, “up thim nostrils of yours, and laarn to spake like a Christian. What call have you to it more nor us? If the Mexicans was bate, who bate them? Wasn't the Merrican armee all Irish boys from the ould country? So none o' yer Yankee boastin' about whippin' thim five to one; and to hell with your tax, Mr. Barebones; we'll dig our bellies full.”

One word “borried another, my darlint,” as Mr. Burke would say, “till down came the possay cometat-us, when the fun began in raal earnest, and maybe the tax-men didn't get Thulahogue's payment, more kicks nor ha'pence;”—waking your humble servant in the row.

The train pulled up to noon in a kind of peninsula, where the river runs close under a high hill, covered from top to bottom with volcanic debris and sharp vitreous gravel, that wounded the worn-down hoofs of the animals, causing them all to move tenderly. We continued our route in a direct line towards a distant line of willows, which indicated the course of the stream, avoiding a round of at least three miles. The plain was sparsely covered with sage, but marked with immense spaces of saline incrustations, thicker and more firm than any we yet met, not even breaking under the 284 wheel. The effects of a whirlwind were curiously observable as it passed down the valley on the other side of the river along the base of the mountains; but while it was sucking sage and sand in tall spiral columns into the clouds, and wheeling them along in rapid mazes and stupendous gyrations, like huge spectres waltzing to some unearthly music, we had not an air stirring on our side. As we approached the river again we were intercepted by a thick grove of sage, that debarred all progress without the aid of the axe; but it was not much of a job, being narrow; and we were recompensed for our trouble by flushing a pack of sage-hens, from which we picked out three brace, making a most agreeable addition to our customary supper.

The water of the river, now clearly shrinking, both by evaporationand absorption, was positively bitter of alkali, preparing us for an increasing deterioration as we proceeded—not a very consoling look-out for unacclimatised travellers, already suffering from its modified effects. The only cure left us, and one which we resolved pushing to the extreme, was despatch. All our ailing men were growingworse and worse, and lest the example I set them of riding in a waggon should embolden others to look for a similar indulgence, I made up my mind to resume the saddle next day, let my pain or suffering be what it might, as the lighter the load the greater the impunity from travel, and even half a day saved from the trials of such a march would be cheaply purchased at so much self-denial.

285

Next day I had my charger saddled, but was painfully puzzled to get into my seat, my wound, though improved, being still much inflamed. We presented rather a novel appearance, some with green goggles, others with bandages across their mouths, and the remainder with aprons on their

lips, which were really frightful and disgusting to look upon. The river, which heretofore flowed through flat bottoms, nearly on a level with its banks, now bent its course through high sand bluffs, outside of which our trail lay; the general face of the valley, though more rolling and broken, was still of the same unvarying character. We found in several places large masses of vegetable matter, looking like petrified fungi, which struck me as out of place amidst the profusion of volcanic matter scattered so thickly around. I was curious enough to take a specimen on with me, without being able to obtain a satisfactory solution as to their anomalous location, for there was not the smallest particle of vegetation except sage beyond the bluffs, and even that appeared worsted in the battle of existence.

At nooning time we unharnessed from the waggons where they stood on the trail, and drove the stock over the sand-hills to the river; but even there the feed was very indifferent, and the porous banks were fast diminishing the river into a paltry stream, now nearly the consistence of thin gruel, so fully was it impregnated with alkali, and nearly at a blood heat. Taking a hint from the East Indian mode of cooling fluids, I sewed up my canteen in flannel, which produced a good effect, all the rest covering theirs in like manner, 286 the effects of the lye not being so perceptible in the cooler beverage. The most smothering drive we had yet was this evening's one, over the light ashy dust, mixed with the white powder, drifted at times from the contiguous incrustations, forming an imponderous volatile composition, that, once stirred up, only went to rest with the sun, fillig the circumambient air with all sorts of prismatic hues, and making us smart as it settled in the deep chinks in our lips. In some places it gathered in waves upon the plain after the subsidence of the winds, like a frozen ocean, reaching the mules' bellies as they waded through them at a snail's pace, that threatened momentarily to subside into total inaction. I believe it is Miss Mitford who designates dust “as mud in high spirits;” but I would, for my part, rather encounter it in its most sullen mood, than while thus disporting itself in cloudy mirth and revelry.

I observed some of the horses this evening running water from the eyes, while three more were added to the list of men ailing in that way. There was much sighing and despondency; but I sought to keep up their spirits by the assurance that three days more would bring us to the banks of Carson River, a cool, limpid stream, fed from the pure source of everlasting snow; yet three days' probation

to men in their state looked like eternity. Our camp to-night was on the trail, and at noon the mules were driven over the sand-hills to pasture—such as it was—but not one of them, that I saw, went near the water.

The only change worthy of notice in our next day's travel was, that instead of travelling outside the sand 287 bluffs the trail crossed them as they receded from the river, and let us down into a level alluvial bottom, evidently the course of the river in its swollen state. It was grassy in spots, and, to our great relief and delight, free from dust; the wheeling, too, was so firm that the mules stepped out with new pluck, rattling merrily along, and making us forget, in our improved progress, “all the ills that flesh is heir to;” for I do conscientiously believe that briskness of motion imparts elasticity and buoyancy to the spirits, as gloom and sadness always travel by a slow coach, moving like a hearse to the graves of gaiety and good humour. We made a splendid forenoon's drive of it, opening out by ten o'clock into a wide grassy plain, exactly on a level with that on which we travelled, and, like it, bounded all round with sandhills. This, I take it, is a lake in high water, backed up by the incapacity of the Sink to engorge so unusual a quantity, which convinced me we were approaching it, making me sanguine enough about reaching it that evening, although somewhat without the distance which, according to apocryphal data, we had to travel; but in those unexplored regions a miss of a few miles might not be wondered at, when, on turnpike-roads at home, Hodge, that has been born and living in the parish all his life, will give an answer a few miles wide of the mark to an enquiry as to the distance to yonder village.

We nooned on the western verge of the basin, the river “becoming fine by degrees and beautifully less,” and the water more deplorably bitter; but I kept alive 288 the gay temper of the party by promising rations of brandy and water in the evening. The shoeing on one of the waggons got so loose towards evening we had to pull up and wedge it all round; indeed, all were in a very shaky state for getting over the Great Sierra Nevada; however, I knew, when I got amongst brooks, and rivulets, and snow-drifts, they would quickly regain their usual dimensions. The bluffs again approached the river, but left us a nice level track to travel on, where we stepped out, I can assure you, as if we carried the mail, without kicking up a dust either, having no turbulent or ambitious fly travelling round the nave of the wheel. Stiff and aching as I was, I rode forward a good distance,

hoping to have an agreeable surprise for my companions by announcing the Sink; and was very nearly betrayed into the mistake on coming within view of a large tract of reeds and bulrushes, without any open line amongst them that I could see indicating the course of the river. Before, however, I turned round to return, and hail them with the glad shout, I rode round to the north-west side of the rushes, and there, to my disappointment, I found the odious river again emerging, running through a fertile hollow, where I chalked out our bivouac for the night. I alit and stretched upon the ground to await their arrival, and was in a sound slumber when they came up, calling for the brandy. The instant after the animals were liberated a brimmer was served round to each, and drank off without the contaminating admixture of any of Humboldt's water; after which, we all turned on with 289 a satisfied feeling, arising from the distance we made in the day's journey, together with the expectation of reaching the Sink on the morrow.

At breakfast next morning several complained of sore throats and difficulty of swallowing. Having been myself a martyr to that ailment for a few years of my life, I undertook to prescribe for them. They arose from ulcers formed in the glands, produced, as I believe, by the use of the bad water, and the constant gulping down of the dust. The coffee this morning—augh! it was not drinkable—being more nauseous by far than a decoction of senna and salts—a few mouthfuls of the cool fluid from our canteens, and a little bread, constituted our meagre meal; as I induced them to refrain from bacon in consequence of the thirst it would be sure to engender. The appearance of the animals was anything but gratifying, all of them being tucked up in the carcases from the want of drink and feed, seeming stupid and heavy; nor was there enough of meal to afford them gruel without trenching on the stock laid by for the Desert, which I held sacred. Altogether the caravan in every branch—men, animals, and waggons—was in a very seedy and unsound state, more nearly resembling a batch of invalids crawlingin search of an hospital, than a band of adventurous travellers charging the Great Sierra Nevada to jump into the golden valley of the Sacramento. But this loadstar, and the anticipated luxuries of those fertile regions, teeming with delicious fruits, and decked in floral robes of undecaying loveliness, kept up the flagging spirits, 290 and begat an energy which, although the pure offspring of hope, largely increased our physical abilities.

We were again troubled with the dust to-day, but not to the great extent of some days back. However, the wheeling was sound and good, leaving little of a draught once the waggons were in motion. My wound was considerably better, enabling me to ride without much pain; so I started forward to examine the country with three other horsemen, expecting from every little rise to see the long wished-for Sink before us. We saw numerous moving specs along the hills to northward that we knew were Indians, which restrained us from going too far in advance, lest they should be disposed to give us a “Roland for our Oliver,” in remembrance of the ducking a few evenings back. About nine o'clock we came to another rushy swamp, not, however, fully answering the description of the Sink, but from the fine patches of grass that were growing about it, we stopped to await the waggons, and commenced cutting it with our knives, and tying it in bundles, to provide feed for the Desert, in which, by the accounts given by the few who have crossed it, we were not to expect any oasis or hospitable spot.

We staked our horses, and were stooped diligently at work without a suspicion of any sort; but after a little, as one of us stood up for a rest, as the tailors do, he saw we were favoured with the presence of about thirty Diggers, sitting quietly on their haunches, looking on at our proceedings. Our first impulse was to run to our rifles; but the pacific posture of our visitors, and their 291 nods and smiles, forbade the apprehension of danger. After a minute or so one of them arose, and held out his hand for the knife, making signs that he would cut grass if I would give it him. I accordingly handed him one, signifying my satisfaction; and at it he went like a good workman, laughing immoderately at the idea of his new employment. On seeing him go on so well I made signs to him that, if he got the others to help him, I would give them something for their trouble when the waggons came up —a proposition they assented to with alacrity, those to whom we could not furnish knives pulling it up by the roots, so that in a short time we had our hay harvest in a very forward state. I kept my promise with my sable mowers, giving in addition to his food to the Indian who led the way, a red flannel shirt, not, I must admit, in the most healthy condition. They were all mightily pleased, and eager for another job on the same terms, the shirt appearing to tickle their fancies amazingly, though the gentleman to whom I presented it got into it in an unfashionable manner, inserting his

arms through certain apertures in the armpits, and permitting the sleeves to hang down empty, like those on hussar jackets, evidently showing he was unaccustomed to haberdashery decorations.

I made most elaborate efforts by signs, shrugs, and nods, with a liberal admixture of winks, to ascertain the whereabouts of the Sink, without being able to make them comprehend me. But I was enabled to form some idea of the distance by learning from them that “the great hills were only three suns' distance from us,” which they indicated by pointing one elbow into 292 the air, then looking up at the sun and describing the segment of a circle three times with the fore-finger of the other hand. A sun, according to their pantomimic meaning, measures about fifty miles—the distance they can travel in a day—which would leave the Sierra Nevada 150 miles distant, and the Sink consequently very contiguous.

We divided out trusses into four lots, assigning one to each waggon, and resumed our journey, without taking our full spell, in our anxiety to reach the Sink. Passing over a sharp gravelly bottom, full of flinty vitreous particles, very severe on the feet, round the hip of a low black mountain, so volcanic in appearance you would imagine the fires had just been quenched for a holiday, the rocks and scoria looking as cindery as if just drawn from a furnace. From this we had a full view of the low sand ridges and marshy swamps that engulf the final dribble of Humboldt River. We passed round to the south-west side over an immense baked plain, without shrub, or sand, or gravel, perfectly hard and unpleasantly white, paining the vision as it reflected back the sun's rays, and halted close by the reeds, along which there was a wide saline incrustation, and a very foetid abominable stench. The Sink, I could see, swelled into a lake in the rainy seasons, covering the plain over which we passed with an unbroken sheet of water; but at present it was composed of a parcel of stagnant ponds and sloughs, without the slightest eddy that would give the idea of a sink or swallow-hole, so that I would be inclined to think the waters are principally, if not altogether, carried off by evaporation, 293 except what is subtracted by the absorption of the dry thirsty sands about the district.

The moment we arrived, we commenced taking off the wheels and submerging them in the swamp till evening, when we were to start again, the order of progress for crossing the Desert being one

night's march; a morning pause, to let the animals eat the grass; another short stop, to give them gruel at noon; and then, ho! for Carson River, without a halt. The distance was sixty miles; but about ten from the Sink there are some sulphur springs, where the water is somewhat drinkable; there we arranged to fill our four water-kegs to make gruel for the stock, and our own canteens, which was all we were to expect. We apprehended great difficulty in keeping the faint trail in the dark, but agreed to take it in turns of two, to walk and act as pilots; all nerving ourselves for the undertaking, by the conviction that twenty-four hours more of unflinching perseverance would extricate us from our miseries, and bring us within reach of that unappreciated fluid, more precious in our suffering condition than the untold wealth of California.

During the afternoon, as I thought over what we endured in coming down Humboldt River thus early in the season, when its waters were good for over half the distance, I felt horrified while reflecting on the fearful trials that awaited the unfortunate emigrants in the rear, who would not probably reach it until that advanced period when, from source to Sink, it is little better than a strong solution of alkali; and many of those, too, 294 travelling by slow ox-teams, that, at the very lowest computation, would take one-third longer in accomplishing it than we did. I regarded it as a task next thing to impossible, and lamented to think it involved the fate of many an unconscious emigrant. Subsequent events fully justified my fears, for I afterwards heard from packers who arrived in California late in the year, that the banks of the Humboldt presented a truly shocking spectacle, marked by the perch, for the entire way, with rotting carcases of mules, horses, and oxen, and many a mound, showing the last resting-place of poor fellows who sank under the fearful pangs of thirst, shrivelled to death under a burning sun, with only poisoned water to wet their fevered lips.

Some, who were able to bear up under those trials, lost all their teams, and were compelled, as a last resource, to take such packs of provisions as men in their enfeebled state could carry, with a journey of near five hundred miles, the Desert and the Sierra Nevada still before them. It was not unusual to see a devoted mother staggering over those burning plains, carrying her helpless offspring on her back, when drooping herself from sickness and exhaustion. All of those, every soul, would have inevitably perished only for the charity and humanity of stronger and more fortunate travellers, who shared with a cheerful alacrity every necessary they possessed; some of

them, in their uncalculating bounty, reducing themselves to the same level of destitution, from which they in turn were only partially rescued by an extraordinary effort of the government, who sent 295 from California, on being apprised of their condition, supplies of provision and animals to carry them to their destination. Yet this is the river of which Colonel Fremont says, in the extract already quoted, “that possess qualities which, in the progress of events, may give it both value and fame, having properties that give it a prospective value in future communications with the Pacific.” Fame it already has, of a dreadful and lugubrious character; but how it can ever be valuable as a means of communication with the Pacific, subject to such excessive alternations as it annually experiences, at one season swollen beyond its banks in an impetuous current, and then subsiding into a ropy puddle, I am too stupid to discover.

There is one torment from which it is exempt, so far as my experience goes—that is the musquito persecution; and why it is so I cannot divine, for those poisonous insects are generally hatched in hot suns from the decayed vegetable matter of swamps and sloughs, which abound all along its solitary course. Nor can the mineral properties of the region have anything to do with their absence, for the Platte runs through an alkaline soil, and Bear River empties itself into the Great Salt Lake amidst the buzz of their detestable music.

296

CHAPTER XVIII.

The Wheels braced by Immersion—Face the Desert in good Spirits—Blinding Dust—The Sulphur Springs—Heat of the Morning Sun—Grand Exhibition of Mirage—Dreadful Toil—Withering Heat—Insensibility of some of the Men—Impatience of the Stock while getting their Gruel—Temporary Insanity—Simoom—Its Providential Effects—Hurrah! Carson's River—The Science of Guzzling—Conduct of the Insane Men—Scenes of the Desert—Heartless Conduct—Whence the Name of Carson River—Its Course and Peculiarities—A Day's Rest in Paradise—Recovery of the Invalids—Colonel Fremont's Description of the Great Basin. AT one o'clock we had our wheels on, mules to, and everything ready for the Desert march. The wheels were all the better for the immersion, being braced as tight as drums, and free from the slightest rattle—a compliment I am unable to pay

the men and animals, who were as lank as gentility itself. However, the fulness of spirit made up for any corporeal shrinking, for they all responded to the order “march” with as obedient an alacrity as if going to witness a review. We soon left the greenish confines of the Sink in a south-westerly course, and got out on the shores of the sandy ocean, calculating to reach the sulphur springs before dark; but we got in amongst the still billows of the light ashy earth which I have before described, 297 that retarded us very seriously, the mules being literally obliged to breast through them, making the dust arise in such dense clouds it well-nigh nearly suffocated us, completely blinding us as to the track. We had near three miles of this nuisance, and by the time we got through the mules were panting from exhaustion, and snorting or sneezing convulsively from the effects of the quantity of stuff lodged in their nostrils, and inhaled in their breathing.

It so happened, owing, I suppose, to the watchful sagacity of the mules, that we did not go much aside from the trail, which we soon regained by a slanting course to the north-west; but in consequence of the delay in the soft sand, it was ten o'clock when we reached the neighbourhood of the sulphur springs, which we would have undoubtedly overrun, only that the mules set up a most discordant braying, which warned us of their proximity. We watered those in harness without disengaging them, leaving the loose ones to help themselves, but the water was too strong of sulphur to permit of their taking a long drink. We filled our kegs and canteens after taking a few sips, for neither the nose nor palate relished it much, getting on very well during the night afterwards, the sand being tolerably compact, and the light from the twinkling stars being sufficient to point out the trail. At the first grey blink of morning we took out the mules and unharnessed them, that they might enjoy a tumble, giving them the grass, and taking ourselves a stretch of an hour, the time appointed for the guard to call us up.

298

The red sun was peeping over the eastern mountains in our rear when we arose to eat a biscuit moistened in sulphur water. I expected to have seen the peaks of the Great Sierra Nevada, but the hazy horizon of the sandy waste hid them from our view, leaving nothing to be seen but sand, not even a solitary plant of artemesia marking the unvarying surface of the Desert. The sun fired up with great intensity, and so very early as eight o'clock struck with a glow that made us quail

at the idea of its meridian vigour, causing us to have frequent recourse to the stinking liquor in our canteens. I admonished all to husband it, bad as it was, with a miserly care, desiring them to try the expedient of carrying a pebble in their mouths, which generated a secretion that modified the appetite of thirst. We got on at a round steady pace, averaging three miles per hour, until ten o'clock, when we met a district of soft sand, not of the impenderous sort, which strained the sinews of the honest mules to their utmost extent, making it painful to look at the steadfast creatures as they worked determinedly along, seeing that the labour was so very distressing, for even the loose stock got through it with considerable exertion.

We had an opportunity this morning of witnessing, I think in its most copious and magnificent form, that wonderful illusory spectacle of mirage, first in the shape of an extensive lake, whose placid and translucent bosom was dotted over with lovely islands, beautifully wooded and gracefully reflected in the glassy waters, its picturesque shores indented with shady bays, and 299 handsome peninsulas jutting out at points, finely timbered with stately trees. Then, like the moving of a stupendous panorama, the waters passed away to make room for the semblance of a mighty city, surmounted with domes, and spires, and columns, obelisks and minarets, opening into vast architectural vistas and enchanting boulevards; where triumphal arches, frowning towers, and gorgeous pagodas were successively disclosed to view; and as those melted into haze, the sylvan suburbs swelled ravishingly on the sight, revealing majestic parks and umbrageous avenues, that alluringly invited us to their cool, delicious shades. But this is a tame and inadequate description of the superb illusion, the marvellous grandeur of which is alike beyond the powers of the pen to describe or the pencil to portray. I thought for the time I was on enchanted ground, forgetting in my admiring amazement the arid Desert and its burning horrors. It is a curious fact with regard to mirage, as showing how much more largely the animal than the man is endowed with mere instinct, that while the reasoning creature is frequently deceived in the exercise of the sense of vision, the dumb brute is never for a moment at fault. We often saw what we could have sworn was water, and would have been betrayed into a phantom hunt only for the silence of the mules, whose superior sagacity could detect its neighbourhood without the corroboration of a glimpse.

After two hours of dreadful toiling through the loose hot sands we emerged on a hard plain, broken in places, but devoid of a particle of any sort of vegetation. 300 This was a great relief to the draught animals; but the direct flames of the solar fire seemed absolutely to curl around us, creating a wavy visible sort of atmosphere, as if we were moving through transparent smoke; and this at length produced a state of insensibility in some and madness in others, four of the men coming up to me and demanding water in a most peremptory tone, as if I had a supply, and denied them access to it. About twelve o'clock we halted, to administer the gruel to the animals, but there were only seven men out of the entire able to lend a hand. Some were howling for water, and some threw themselves in a fainting state under the shade of the waggons. I never felt myself so nearly overcome; and only for a great effort I made, feeling that, as the conductor of the company, it was incumbent on me to set a good example, I should have also sank in the struggle. As soon as the poor brutes in harness heard the gurgling of the water from the kegs, they brayed, as I thought, in a piteous tone, saying, “Oh! let us have some;” while the others pressed around, being with difficulty restrained from trampling on us while we were draining it off; and it was a matter of no small trouble to give each his basin, from the manner in which the others would poke into it.

This done, the word “Move” was passed; but I found one of the teamsters altogether incapable of driving, and, sore against my grain, had to place him and the two insane men in the waggons, the latter having become so restless and outrageous that I was reluctantly constrained to resort to the disagreeable alternative of 301 tying them down. Those that were under the waggons did not appear to hear the order, nor could they be got to heed its iteration until the waggons were moved on, and they were left exposed to the sun, when they arose, but in a dreadfully enervated state. I implored, I exhorted them to struggle on for two hours more, when we would reach relief; but they were deaf and insensible, and had to be lifted into their saddles. At length we all got in motion, and three of the least exhausted men rode ahead on our best horses, with directions to return and meet us as soon as possible with water, which I knew, from the time of travel, could not be more than ten or twelve miles off, unless we missed our way; an idea I would not listen to, for it involved our entire destruction.

Soon after the men sarted, a small black cloud arose in the north, and before it attained any great magnitude a sighing air of wind was felt passing us by, followed in the distance by a line of dust extending along the entire horizon. I never heard of a simoom on the North American continent, but I saw the effects of a whirlwind, and thought there was one now rushing upon us, from which there was no shelter or escape, the only thing to be done being to back the waggons in a line to it, and await its fury and results. Before, however, the evolution was fully made, it came upon us with a roaring violence, driving the sand before it in clouds and waves that soon raised in a drift to the height of the waggons, the mules and horses, cowering, backed into the shelter, while the roof was torn completely off one waggon and carried out of sight like a feather. It had not been raging quite five minutes 302 when heavy drops of rain began falling, the wind abating as they increased into a copious deluge, that drenched everything, quenched our fever, and entirely resuscitated the animals, producing all the effects of an internal draught, the greedy pores of the skin absorbing it instantaneously, for the shower was not well over when the saturated garments were as dry as spunk. The poor creatures in the waggons derived some relief from sucking the waggon sheets, and with one accord we raised our hands and thoughts to a beneficent Providence, returning thanks for the timely deliverance.

All now felt endowed with fresh vigour, and were quite independent of succour when the men returned from the river, reporting it only four miles distant; at the same time pointing out to us the line of planting peeping above the sand bluffs; so that within one hour and a half we were driving down the slope to Carson River. Before it appeared in view the loose stock ran madly past us, dashing into the cooling current, until they were nearly aswim. The mules, too, in harness made a rush to be off, one team actually succeeding in breaking away in consequence of the weakness of the teamster, upsetting the waggon in the stream, damaging everything it contained, and very nearly drowning one of the insane men who was tied in it. Some of the men appeared to have as little self-control as the brutes, and kept swilling goblet after goblet until I thought they would burst. I permitted the insane men to crawl out, and went down with them, lest they should go beyond their depth; but instead of approaching the 303 water, they both lay down in the wet sand as with one impulse, and commenced scraping it over their stomachs precisely in the same manner,

endeavouring, you would fancy, to imitate each other in all their actions and incoherent ravings. I got each to drink a small cup of water, and had them removed to their tents, administering some cooling medicine, which produced a very quick and salutary effect.

We remained where we were for the night, the whole duty of standing guard, cooking, &c., &c., devolving on myself and two others, the remainder, and those in regular rotation, protesting their utter inability to do so. It was particularly hard on me, being on duty the night before; but I was so elated at having got over the Desert in safety, I made no scruple about it, though I must admit my eyes were unwilling parties in the undertaking, giving me incessant bother to keep them in a state of active co-operation.

I heard from the same parties who gave me the information respecting Humboldt River, that the scenes and occurrences in the Desert even transcended the others in melancholy horror, the whole line being marked with putrid carcases and deserted waggons, while the air was filled with the moans of the dying, the wails of the suffering, and the wild screams of the maniac. Few, if any, had teams in a state to take them over the barren waste at one flight, nine-tenths being obliged to wait in the middle of this oven, and send on the animals to recruit for a few days; when some few that were in a position to do so, commenced a trade of packing small kegs of water on their mules and retailing it at 304 exorbitant rates; but their heartless extortions drove the sufferers into a united exertion to sink a well, which was rewarded by a moderate supply of tolerable water. I have no manner of doubt, that had we proceeded without lightening our loads, we would also have been obliged to halt, for even with what we carried we had very little indeed to spare.

Carson River takes its name from a celebrated mountaineer called Kit Carson, who from his earliest years evinced a great disposition for roaming amidst the wild scenes of his unexplored country; a leaning he afterwards indulged in to the fullest extent, anticipating the discoveries of scientific research, becoming thoroughly familiarised with Indian habits, and personally known to many of the tribes, over whom he exerts a great influence. He gave his name, as in this instance, to localities, from being the first to find them out; aiding the government of his country in making amicable treaties with warlike Indians; and is now, I believe, in the employ of the States, in some capacity

connected with the sphere of his experience. Carson River is a handsome clear stream, and has its source in the regions of perpetual snow flowing down the eastern flank of the Sierra Nevada, and like all the rivers issuing from the mountains in the circumference of the Great Basin, obeys the general law of losing itself in a lake of its own formation. It abounds in salmon trout, and has a course of about one hundred miles, with a fine bench of alluvion running along it the entire distance on each side, save where it cañons in the mountains.

The morning after our arrival we moved about five 305 miles up the river, into a glorious meadow of clover and rich nutritious grasses, shaded with gigantic oak and cotton-wood trees, under which the stock fed with comfort, there being no brush or underwood to interrupt them. I deemed it prudential to remain here for two days, to allow them to pluck up for the last great task—the crossing of the Sierra—giving those who had a *penchant* for light-coloured linen an opportunity of exclaiming, with Hamlet, “Aye, there's the rub.” There was a nice shelving sand-bank on our temporary domain, sloping into the stream, from the stem of an over-hanging oak, over which the tiny waves of the limpid current chased each other in smiling sportiveness, wooing us into their chaste embrace with resistless witchery. This was the favourite haunt of all; here we bathed, and rolled, and lolled, and paddled, cleansing away in the pure stream the abominations of the Humboldt, and drinking deep draughts of health and vigour at this primitive dispensary, so that, within the forty-eight hours of our sojourn, the general improvement was as astonishing as it was delightful.

Although still near ninety miles from the great Sierra Nevada, I regarded myself as at the rim of the Great Basin, once over the Desert, a brief description of which I will transcribe from the condensed memoir of Colonel Fremont already quoted from, showing how exactly it tallies in the general character with the description I give of it in the foregoing pages:

“East of the Sierra Nevada, and between it and the Rocky Mountains, is that anomalous feature in the continent—the Great Basin—the existence of which 306 was advanced as a theory after my second expedition, and is now established as a geographical fact. It is a singular feature, a basin of some five hundred miles in diameter every way, between four and five thousand feet above the

level of the sea, shut in all around by mountains, with its own system of lakes and rivers, having no connexion whatever with the sea, partly and sparsely inhabited.

“The general character of the Great Basin is that of desert, but with great exceptions, there being many parts of it fit for the residence of civilised people, and of these parts the Mormons have lately established themselves in one of the largest and best. Mountain is the predominating structure of the interior of the basin, with plains between the mountains wooded and watered, the plains arid and sterile, the interior mountains conforming to the law which governs the course of the Rocky Mountains and the Sierra Nevada, ranging nearly north and south, and present a very uniform character of abruptness, rising suddenly from a very narrow base of ten or twenty miles, and attaining an elevation of two to five thousand feet above the level of the country on which they stand. They are grassy and wooded, showing snow on their summit peaks during the greater part of the year, and affording small streams of water, from five to fifty feet wide, which lose themselves, some in lakes, some in dry plains, and some in belts of alluvial soil at their base—for these mountains have very uniformly this belt of alluvion, the wash and abraison of their sides—rich in excellent grasses, fertile and light, and loose enough to absorb small streams. Between 307 these mountains are the arid plains, which receive and deserve the name of the Desert. Such is the general structure of the interior of the Great Basin—more Asiatic than American in its character, and much resembling the elevated regions between the Caspian Sea and Northern Persia. The rim of the Great Basin is massive; ranges of mountain, of which the Sierra Nevada on the west, the Wah-Satch and Timpanogos chains on the east, are the most conspicuous. On the north it is separated from the waters of the Columbia by a branch of the Rocky Mountains, and from the Gulf of California on the south by a bed of mountain ranges, of which the existence has only been very recently determined.

“Snow abounds on them all; in some, on their loftier parts, the whole year round, with wood, and grass, and copious streams of water, that sometimes amount to considerable rivers, flowing inwards, and forming lakes or sinking in the sands. Belts or benches of good alluvion are usually found at their base. The interior of the Great Basin, so far as explored, is found to be a succession of sharp mountain ranges and naked plains, such as have been described. These ranges are isolated,

presenting summit lines broken into peaks, of which the highest are between ten and eleven thousand feet above the level of the sea. They are thinly wooded, with some varieties of pine (pinus monophylbus characteristic) cedar, aspen, and a few other varieties, and afford in places an excellent quality of bunch grass, equal to any found on the Rocky Mountains. Black-tailed deer and mountain sheep are 308 frequent in these mountains, which, in consideration of their grass, water, and wood, and alluvion at their base, may be called fertile in the radical sense of the word, as signifying a capacity to produce or bear, and in contradistinction to sterility. Sterility on the contrary, is the absolute characteristic of the valleys between the mountains—no wood, no water, no grass—the gloomy artemesia, the prevailing shrub—no animal except the fleet and timid antelope, always on the watch for danger, and finding no place too dry or barren, which gives a wide horizon for its view and a clear field for its flight. Few birds are seen on the plains or mountains. But few Indians are found, and these, in the lowest state of human existence, being not in communities, but in the elementary state of families, and sometimes a single individual to himself, except about the lakes, stocked with fish, which is the property and resort of a small tribe. The abundance and excellence of the fish in most of the lakes is a characteristic, and the fishing season to those Indians is the happy season of the year."

309

CHAPTER XIX.

Start from Carson River—Abridged Edition of the Desert—First View of the Great Sierra Nevada —Innocent Reflections—Laudable Forbearance—Doubt and Anxiety—Removed by Patience— Indian Mischief—Sad Retribution—No Alternative—Appearance of the Country—Indian Troop— Their Errand—Their Views—Carson River again—Can't catch Fish—Indian Footprints—Tangled Trail—Volcanic Debris—Surprise—Some Indians—Their Terror—Their loathsome Look— Trail over Cinders and Clinkers—Its Effect on the Mules and Waggons—Full Profile of the Great Sierra Nevada—Its grand Appearance—Lovely Valley—Gigantic Pines—Fremont's Description —Our Camp at the Mountain Base—Indian Visit—Trade for Trout—They dissemble their Skill in Archery—Method of drawing them out—More Fish next Morning—Indian Mode of getting into English Apparel—Romantic Emotions—Yankee Definition—Passage of an awful Canon—

Description—A break down—The Crossing of the Torrent—Reed Lake—Reach the Foot of the Pass—Its impracticable Look—What the Horses think of it—What the Mules—Preparations for the Ascent. ON the morning of the fourth day after reaching the Carson, we started in improved health and spirits, to accomplish the last great stage of our long and trying journey, travelling close to and parallel with the river for six miles; we then separated, holding our course due west, it taking a southerly sweep amongst the mountains. As soon as we left it, we lost the grass and the level trail, and became encompassed once more in the gloomy wildernesses of artemesia, with a long, trying rise to ascend. The path was uncommonly rough, and would have shaken the wheels to pieces, had we not left them 310 soaking in the river for two days. From the point at which we left the river to where we expected to strike it again, the distance laid down in our way-bill was twenty-five miles, an abridged edition of the Desert the whole way, without water or grass, making the day's journey thirty-one miles; quite long enough on good roads, but certainly too far, if it could be avoided, over loose rocks, and stones, and sharp gravel, such as lay in our way. From the summit of the rise we got the first good and distinct view of the Great Sierra Nevada range, stretching beyond the scope of vision, north and of south, with pointed snow-capped peaks between us and the land of promise, reminding me of days gone by, and garden walls capped with glass to prevent naughty boys from stealing the rich fruit beyond them; but greedy urchins climbed the garden walls, and plucked the fruit, and avaricious men scaled the glaciered ridges of the mountain, and were gathering the treasure that nature enclosed so jealously.

There was nothing grand or striking in the immediate scenery, but there were precipitous passes, too numerous to mention, which I would have been glad in the earlier part of my journey to have had to descant on, but the reader and I have by this time become too familiarised with scenes of the sort not to concur in opinion that it would smack of bookmaking were I to give even kit-cat portraits of such common places. This day was not so insufferably hot as usual, which induced us to forego our nooning, rather than run the risk of not gaining the river before dark. The animals, too 311 were working well up to their collars, which gave us another plea for doing so. As we consumed the afternoon every eye was looking anxiously to the south, to see where we might again expect to meet the Carson; but the very close and unbroken look of the mountain chain in that direction did not

appear to leave any aperture for it to come through, and the distance round the extreme point was such that it would be quite impossible to get up before night. We followed on the trail mechanically a considerable distance in this suspense, all agreeing that we might not expect to find the river until we reached the mountain point; but just as the vote of coincidence was taken, we were pleasingly convinced of our error, by the opening out of a dark glen in the mountain-side, through which it forced its way, and was travelling all the time of our disputation, within almost ear-shot of the debate, on the other side of a high sand bluff, where we fixed our camp.

Before dusk we were startled by the stock, who rushed up from the river edge in a terrible fright, the cause of which was soon apparent from an arrow, as ill luck would have it, in the neck of the bell-mare, who, when she looked back on the shaft with its feathered end sticking out, wheeled round and round, as if to avoid and shake it off; then, snorting in affright, galloped for a spurt, followed, as a matter of course, by the remainder of the animals, some of which at length coming in contact with it, broke it off close by the flesh. It was high up in the crest, and therefore not dangerous, scarcely bleeding a drop; but although she permitted 312 us to catch her, she would not allow us, all we could do, to extract it; so we let her rest until morning, turning our attention to the perpetrators of the outrage.

The night was pretty clear, with the moon a quarter old, and six men volunteered to cross the river about half a mile down, where, spreading out over a wide, gravelly bar, it became shallow and fordable. The mare having become peaceable, the stock commenced feeding again, while we returned to our tents as if nothing occurred, watching at the same time closely. Soon after it was evident there was something astir, for the animals all raised up their heads, looking towards the river, and almost at the same moment four distinct shots were heard on the other side. On running down, our comrades shouted over to us that two of the wretched Indians were killed out of a party of eighteen or twenty. It would have given me gratification if they were crippled or wounded, as they richly deserved some punishment for such acts, but the hurrying of two unfortunate souls into eternity for hunting a dumb beast, came, I must say, with sad concern upon my conscience. However, it must be allowed, that unless such conduct was checked, by making summary examples,

the lives and properties of hundreds of emigrants might be sacrificed by having their teams destroyed, and being thus disabled from reaching their destination.

We separated from the river early next day, again taking a line to the mountain point remarked the evening before. The path here was perfectly level for 313 eight miles, and free from obstruction of any sort. But as we advanced, detached peaks started into view all around us, having no connexion whatever with the Sierra, of pleasing configuration, grassy, and partially timbered to the tops, but none attaining an elevation to retain the snow caps. After passing the point, the trail descended an incline for about five miles, bisecting in a dark line an immense white tract, that shone like snow in its glossy whiteness, which at the distance I took for a large saleratus lake dried up by evaporation. When about half-way down the slope a considerable body of mounted men were seen riding at a rapid pace across it, whom I distinguished by the glass to be Indians—perhaps on a mission of revenge. I was sick at the thought of blood since last night, but, nevertheless, it was a duty we owed ourselves to guard against danger; so I called on the men to prepare, but be cool and steady.

The Indians had by this time come pretty close, and were driving before them an unbridled horse, with a short staff carrying the American flag fastened in an upright position to the horn of the saddle; a few of the Indians being partially clothed in civilised attire I concluded we had nothing to apprehend; neither did they fear anything, for they rode right up to us before they pulled a bridle. The chief of the party, speaking some English, told us they came direct from California, from the valley of the Sacramento, and were in the employ of Captain Sutter, who despatched them on their present errand to the head of Humboldt River, to meet Mrs. Sutter, who was on her way out, and 314 conduct her to the settlements. He gave us minute particulars respecting the remainder of the route, and news of great encouragement about the mines; dismounting, going through the form of picking and washing, showing us, by a measure of gravel in his hand, how much we could gather each day “to work good,” but warning us to be on our guard for “bad Indian, as he kill mule;” a piece of advice we all along anticipated. They took their leave without asking for anything (a very unusual occurrence for an Indian), but I suspect Captain Sutter fitted them out so liberally they were not in want, for they had a number of well-laden pack-horses with them.

The white space we saw from the eminence was a stratum of clay whiter than chalk, and polished like statuary marble, excessively hard for about two inches in depth, after which it got gradually softer. From this we ascended to a mountain gap, whence we had another view of Carson River, which was here heavily timbered, reaching it at five o'clock, after a march of twenty-five miles. On watering our stock, we found the sands everywhere imprinted with the bare footmarks of Indians, employed, as we supposed, in fishing, from the number of fine trout we could see in the clear stream; but they studiously avoided us, though if they brought us fish to exchange we would have given them a liberal trade. Their coyness made us all the more watchful, especially from what Sutter's Indians told us; however, they did not molest or annoy us in the least. We spent the evening in angling, some with baits and 315 some with flies, but we did not get a solitary nibble, though we could see those fastidious trout coming up to survey our temptation, and then turn contemptuously away—a sad disappointment, for we laid out accounts for great fish feasting on the Carson. We also tried the net; but the waters were so clear they saw all our movements, and evaded our machinations.

We stuck closely to the river the next day, following it through small cañons and thickly-wooded ravines, where we were obliged to precede the waggons with knives and saws to cut a passage through the tangled brush that was so twined across our path, with nothing but an Indian foot trail, as to be otherwise impervious. In some of the open places on the banks there were temporary huts erected, the spaces about them strewed with fish heads and bones in thick profusion, demonstrating the abundance, and showing, too, that they must have been of a good size; but as yet we could not lay eyes upon an Indian. The river at length bent between two lofty hills, along the base of which the cotton-wood trees were too close to admit of a passage, and too gross to give room for the idea of cutting a line of them down; we therefore took a line inclining to the north, which here rose to a good altitude, exhibiting more recent effects of volcanic action than we had yet met with. We saw plenty of deer-trail in the various dells we passed, and, in the absence of fish, and being now a long time without a change of fresh food, we organised a hunting party, who diverged from the trail, and were not long gone when 316 there arose a loud shout, a sort of whoop, as if in close chase, that gave rise to the expectation of a grizly bear, as we were now within their territory; but as I cantered

to the edge of the break, from whence the sounds issued, I met three squaws carrying their infants, accompanied by two grown-up children, who immediately set up a most piteous piercing cry, and sat down rocking to and fro, seeing they could not escape, and fearing each moment was to be their last. I got down and sought to pacify and assure them, making all the friendly signs I picked up in my travels, but to no purpose; they still kept rocking and wailing in a most penetrating strain, all but the elder children, who did not appear much terrified, standing mutely gazing at me during the scene. I beckoned them to come to the waggons, which were now at hand, and I would make them some presents; as I could not, however, induce them to stir, I went to bring them something, but, so soon as I turned away, they darted again into the thicket, and I saw no more of them. They were loathsome looking wretches, low in stature, with long black matted hair, hanging in ropes over their faces, and of a flabby habit of body that rendered them peculiarly repulsive.

Now and then we could hear another halloo, and finally two shots saluted our ears, that at first startled me, thinking they might have been aimed at the flying Indians; but a recollection of our conversation after the late tragedy reassured me, and further confirmation was soon after added by the hunters themselves, carrying the 317 carcase of a fine black-tailed deer. The hills and country before us had a most scorched and blackened aspect, presenting an appearance as if a volcano had been flaring up in the neighbourhood overnight, and the stones and stuff it vomited up had barely cooled. They were sharp angular blocks, thrown in irregular beds and heaps, like cinders and clinkers around a furnace, and making a very unpleasant causeway; so loosely strewn in places you could see several feet down amongst them, making it dangerous for the tread, and shaking the waggons so tremendously one of the axles showed symptoms of yielding, rendering it necessary to splice and tie it up, while four of the mules got very seriously cut about the legs and fetlocks, which made them unfit to continue in harness.

After scrambling over about three miles of this sort of road, we struck the river again, and went up it a good distance, till we came to a low open tract, which it almost circumvented, the land appearing as if formed by the alluvial deposit of the stream, which, from the watermarks on the hill's sides, we saw covered it completely in the winter season. It had a splendid crop of grass, on which we stopped to noon, and passing from it by a short narrow pass, came into full view of

the great range of the Sierra Nevada, without an obstacle to prevent the eye from scanning the lowest ledge at the base, up to the highest peak in the clear blue azure heavens. It was a noble and astonishing spectacle, especially calculated to arrest and fix the gaze of those only accustomed to behold our little insular tumuli. The range was not more than nine miles off, in a 318 direct line, but the trail took a south-westerly trend, leading into a valley that lay along the foot, embraced by the Carson, that bounded it on the south and east, and which for soil, situation, and natural charms, eclipsed the most highly favoured localities in our journey. I got into an ecstatic mood on entering it, feeling as though I stood in fairy-land; and in the blissful serenity that reigned around, feared almost to breathe, lest the mortal contamination should dissolve the delicious spell by which I was entranced; it looked peacefully hallowed, in its Elysian loveliness—too happy, to divine a spot for the dwelling-place of other than pure unsinful essences, where the cankers of worldly ambition could never take root, or spread their baleful influences. It is some twenty miles long, of an oval shape, reclining in a sweet easy slope from the base of the Sierra to the river, intersected with numerous small streams, of the most crystal clearness, flowing down the mountain flank; the soil composed of a black unctuous loam, that threw up verdant fleeces of clover, and rich indigenous grasses, enamelled with beauteous flowers of the most delicate tints, like a lovely lawn, in contrast with the stupendous range that towered above it in the heavens, with a peculiarity entirely their own, rising immediately from a level surface, like a pyramid from the plain, their sides covered with gigantic pines that partook of their peaky character, standing so far apart, they feathered out below to immense length, and tapering upwards with the most uniform graduation till they terminated in a point formed by a solitary leader.

319

Colonel Fremont thus describes the range:—“The great Sierra Nevada is part of the great mountain range, which under different names, and at different elevations, but with much uniformity of direction, and general proximity to the coast, extends from the peninsula of California to Russian America, and without a gap in the distance, through which the waters of the Rocky Mountains could reach the Pacific Ocean, except at two places where the Columbia and Frazer's River respectively find their passage. The great range is remarkable for its length, its proximity, and its

parallelism to the sea-coast; its great elevation, often more lofty than the Rocky Mountains, and its many grand volcanic peaks, reaching high into the region of perpetual snow, rising singly like pyramids from heavily-timbered plateaux, to the height of fourteen and seventeen thousand feet above the level of the sea. These snowy peaks constitute the characterising feature of this range, and distinguish it from the Rocky Mountains and all others on our part of the continent. That part of the range which traverses Alta California is called the Sierra Nevada (snowy mountains), a name in itself implying a great elevation, and is only applied in Spanish geography to the mountains whose summits penetrate the region of perpetual snow. It is a grand feature of California, and a dominating one, and must be well understood before the structure of the country and the character of its different divisions can be comprehended. It divides California into two parts, and exercises a decided influence on the climate, soil, and productions of each, stretching along the coast, and at a general 320 distance of one hundred and fifty miles from it. This great mountain wall receives the warm winds charged with vapour, which sweep across the Pacific Ocean, precipitates their accumulated moisture in fertilising rain and snows upon its western flank, and leaves the cold dry winds to pass to the east. Hence the differences of the two regions, mildness, fertility, and a superb vegetable kingdom on one side, comparative barrenness and cold on the other, the two sides of the Sierra Nevada exhibit two distinct climates. The state of vegetation, in connexion with some thermometrical observations made during the recent exploring expedition to California, will establish and illustrate this difference. In the beginning of December we crossed the Sierra at latitude 39 deg. 17 min. 12 sec, at the head of Salmon Trout River (about forty miles north of the Carson), forty miles north of New Helvetia, and made observations at each base, and in the same latitude, to determine the respective temperatures, the two bases being, respectively—the western base about five thousand feet, the eastern about four thousand feet above the level of the sea. The mean result of the observations were—on the eastern side, at sunrise, 9 deg.; at noon, 44 deg; at sunset, 30 deg.; the state of the vegetation and the appearance of the country being at the same time (second week of December) that of confirmed winter, the rivers frozen over, snow on the ridges, annual plants dead, grass dry, and deciduous trees stripped of their foliage. At the western base, the mean temperature during a corresponding week, was, at sunrise, 29 deg., and sunset, 321 52 deg.; the state of the atmosphere and of the vegetation that of advancing spring, grass fresh and green,

from four to eight inches high, vernal plants in bloom, the air soft, and all the streams free from ice. Thus December on one side of the mountains was winter, on the other it was spring."

Our camp in the little Elysium was close under the mountains, at one of the several rivulets, the plain about us covered so profusely with clover blossoms, that in fact the animals could lie down and fill themselves on the spot, it grew in such luxuriant abundance. We were busily engaged in supper preparations, grinding coffee, baking buns, and dusting some venison steak with pepper and salt for the pan, when two Indians came into camp, each carrying two glorious trout, weighing, I should say, five pounds each, formed and speckled without any distinguishable difference from our Irish salmon-trout: those we got for two tattered flannel shirts, which furnished a supper that left nothing to be desired. We gave the the Indians to understand we would take all they could bring, and treated them with marked kindness and hospitality, to try and banish their reserve, and establish a good feeling, which, as far as appearance would indicate, they seemed to reciprocate. They were particularly delighted with the hot buns, but we made them use hard bread for filling stuff, not having enough of the others to spare for a full meal. After supper some of the men took up their bows and commenced firing at a tree, without being able to hit it, whereupon they asked the Indians to shoot, which they appeared reluctant to do, but, on being pressed, 322 consented, firing fully as wide of the mark as their white acquaintances. Suspecting, however, they were shamming, I took a bun that was left, and sticking it in the bark of the tree, made signs that, whoever hit it, should have it to eat; on hearing which, one of them took up his bow, and, without any studious aim, drove his arrow right into the dimple of the crust; showing, it was clear, they were disinclined to let us see their skill in the first instance, lest we should harbour bad impressions about them.

Next morning we were midway down the valley, when we saw a lot of Indians crossing it from the river, all carrying fish, which they catch in ingenious traps made of willow, laid in the likely haunts, from which the trout, once in, cannot escape. They had upwards of two dozen very fine ones, from two to five pounds each; and although I had my doubts about their keeping until we could use them, I thought it right to keep my promise and take them all. Not having buns, we made it up in old shirts, worn-out vests, and ventilating pantaloons, which one of those primitive fishermen endeavoured to use in an inverted shape, sticking his arms through the legs, and bringing his

head where his bustle should be, until we pointed out the approved mode of getting into them; an operation, by the way, not so very easy, from the number of apertures that arrested his toes in their descent. As yet we could not see any indentation or sign of a pass, but the Indians pointed to the river, motioning that by following it we would find the place. On leaving this resplendent valley, I looked back on it as a beautiful picture I was 323 going to behold for the last time, and turned from it with a reluctant regret, my head and heart filled with all sorts of romantic and Petrarchical notions and ideas.

The windings of the stream soon again involved us amidst hills and broken ground, through which we wended our way to where it took a decided eastern shoot. There, directly before us, gaped the narrow opening, or cañon, through which we were to pass, I may say, through the bowels of the outer mountain wall. It opened at its gorge into a crescent-shaped green lawn, on which stood a few of the most wondrous trees I ever beheld, piercing the clouds with their pointed tops, while it took three of us with joined hands to girth their stems, which measured good twenty feet in circumference—dimensions I would have regarded as incredible before I saw them, or, according to Yankee definition, “so almighty stout 'twould tire a rat to run round them.” The river came foaming through it in brawling cascades, leaving room enough, such as it was, for a mile to travel along it, but getting more compressed and gloomy as we advanced, the rent and fractured sides so approximating that it made one's flesh creep to look up and see huge crags suspended, you would imagine, by small fibrous twigs, hundreds of feet above your head, wanting only the vibration of an echo to break the frail ligatures, and grind you into eternity; and rent columns of rock, detached from the face of the precipice, standing with such a lean that the perching of a bird on them would cause a shudder lest it should destroy their equilibrium. The path, too, if path it could be called, was unprecedentedly rugged, both mules 324 and waggons staggering over confused piles of rocks, where a goat could scarcely walk with confidence. Further ahead, the roaring of a large cataract boomed upon our ears, and on penetrating to it, it looked as if all further progress was at an end, for the height from which it madly leaped appeared inaccessible to the foot of a climber, much less to the wheels of a waggon; but “auri sacra fames, quid non mortalia pectora cogis?” what looked impossible was soon made practicable; every one prizing and rolling rocks and stones from the top

until the semblance of an incline was formed, on which we hauled up some of the heavier and more compact packages with ropes, and afterwards attaching them to the waggon-poles, with six mules and twenty men to each, got all but one safely to the top. This was the one with the damaged axle, which on this occasion snapped, shivering one of the wheels into atoms—an accident there was only one way of dealing with, for though we could make and mount a pole or axle, a wheel was a pop beyond our ability; so I decided on cutting short the body of the waggon, and mounting it on one pair of wheels, as a balance cart, a job which, taking some hours, decided us on camping on the spot, and working all night, for it did not suit being delayed in such a place, without any feed but twigs and brambles. Long before morning it was finished, and we resumed our march the moment we had light.

About one mile beyond the cataract the river bent over so close to the side we were on as to render a crossing imperative; but on examining and sounding it, the 325 bottom was so uneven we could not dare venture, except by a bridge, or filling up the deep holes; which latter expedient we decided on, rolling from the sides tons upon tons of rocks and stones, then stripping and going in to adjust them —an undertaking that, from the rush of the torrent, was truly dangerous. As soon as our engineer, Mr. D——n, pronounced it practicable, the same brave fellow who made the first descent into the Mormon cañon got into the saddle of the leading team, and forced the reluctant mules into the foaming stream. For a little they went on well, all eyes nervously watching, all pulses quickly beating; but before they came to the centre the lead span shied it, and wheeled round to return. It was an alarming moment, but the driver's nerves were firm; had he wavered or relaxed in the least, all would have been lost—dashed down amongst the rocks with resistless violence; but he held them with a cool and firm hold, until some men rushed in and caught them by the head, straightening them again in the draught; after which, they pulled out without a stop, all the others following without any accident or interruption. After two miles more of jolting and jostling we got into an open space, with good pasture, where we stopped four hours, to permit the animals to make amends for their scant fare the night before.

Inside the outer wall of the mountain we had a delightful evening's journey, over rolling ground and through lovely glens, crowded with black-tailed deer; but as we had a stock of venison and

fish, and were 326 sure of meeting lots of deer all over the Sierra, we did not disturb them. Towards evening we came to a lake close under the main ridges of the mountain, which explorers call Reed Lake—from the broad margin of reeds that surround it; and a short distance beyond the lake, came to the foot of the steep, where the trail curled up to the formidable pass, at the foot of which we halted for the night, to make preparations for the undertaking. Had we met such an ascent in the earlier part of the journey, I fancy we would have pronounced it insurmountable, and turned back in despair; but having encountered so many dangerous places, and overcome so many difficulties, we became inured to hazard and toil, only regarding the greatest obstacles as merely perplexing, but never impossible; and as this was the only remaining one, we were resolved not to be stopped, if recourse was to be had to the agency of powder. By way of experiment, in the evening, just to see if the animals could clamber up, or work in such a perpendicular posture, I tried my horse with a hold of his lariat; but when I brought him to the base of the ascent, he had as little idea of facing it as he would have of climbing a good wall, for, as one of the party said, “It was not onl y right up and down, but leant a little over.” I tried to persuade him first, and then to whip him; but neither was of any use; he did not comprehend me. Not so old Sacramento (the mule), who, like a practised hod man, reared on end as soon as he was brought to the base, and commenced the escalade without an instant's hesitation, clambering frequently in 327 a position that made me fear he should have fallen backwards, until he got to a ledge or shelf, where there was a narrow resting-place. It was quite clear from this essay that we could not calculate much on draught, when the animals would find such difficulty in getting up themselves; so we were all reconciled to the alternative of dismounting the waggons, and hauling them up piecemeal by ropes, only determining first to try one in the usual way, and, if it failed, then resort to the other mode. We occupied ourselves till a late hour in making our loads into portable packs, to get them up in the first instance, and completing all other matters—greasing the wheels, &c., &c., &c.

328

CHAPTER XX.

Commence the Ascent—Horses encouraged by the Mules to make the Trial—A Displaced Rock causes the Death of one of the Horses—The Damages and Difficulties of the Task—Frightful

Chasm—Pure Cold Water—How we got up the Waggons—Danger from the Rocks rolling down—Deplorable Accident—Lose two Mules—Finish the Task—Make a Call on the Echoes of the Sierra Nevada—Winter Scenery in the Dog-days—Paddy Blake's Remark—Deceived as to the Summit of the Range—Drop into a Fertile Valley—Ascents and Descents—The Region of Perpetual Snow—Snow Stairs—Cold Nights—Adopt Indian Tactics—Description of the Mountain Scenery—Measurement of some Trees—Grizly Bear and Family—Moonlight Travel in the Mountain Pines—No Fruit; no Birds—Fertile Basin—The Manzanita—Indian Foray—Pleasant Valley—Californian Quail—Chilian Gold-Diggers—The first Sample of the veritable Stuff, and no mistake—Their Account of the Diggins—Dry Diggins—Average Returns—Weber Creek—End of the Journey for the Present—Time Employed—Our grateful Feelings at its Termination—Seal up the Property of our Departed Comrades—Acquaint their Friends of their melancholy Fate—The Contemplated Railway from the States to the Pacific—Distance Table from Independence to San Francisco. AT daylight we tied light packs on all the loose animals, and drove them at the ascent, at which the horses stopped, as if they could not believe us in earnest; but when they saw the mules climbing, they also made the attempt, while we kept shouting and cracking whips below, not daring to follow them exactly, from the quantity of gravel and stones they rolled down in their efforts to get up, which eventually caused the death of one of the horses; a fragment of displaced rock coming tumbling 329 down, hit him in the forehead, when he fell back and was killed; another horse and a mule also fell backwards, but escaped with some bad cuts and bruises. As soon as they reached the first ledge, we tightened all the packs, and commenced the next, which, being tortuous and amongst timber, was less difficult; but still very steep, and in portions excessively craggy, being much the longest of any. This we surmounted without any accident—two others (one nearly as bad as the first) still remaining. The third we also got over, after divers slips and falls, which brought us to the border of the snowy confines, having here rocky shelves to ascend, without any covering whatever, and scarcely enough of inequalities on their surface to afford any foot-holds for the animals. We had infinite trouble with the horses here before we could get them to try it, and many of them would have turned back if they dared, after they got up a bit, as they glanced tremblingly down over their shoulders. Sometimes one of them slipping would fall and come sliding down, knocking others off their legs, which it required great sprawling and floundering to regain; and others coming to their

knees, remained like fixtures, fearing, if they stirred, they should come rolling down the whole way. Near the top there was a very ugly turn, round the face of a perpendicular rock, with a dreadful chasm below, through which a roaring torrent was impetuously hurrying. The loose animals passed it easily enough; but on measurement I found there were not more than seven or eight inches to spare for the waggons, should we succeed in getting them up 330 so far. Once past this, the rise was more gradual, and led through a skirting of enormous pine into a gap, over which, on each side, there were low peaks, capped with snow, and also deep beds of it in amongst the timber, far below the level at which we then were. There was a bubbling well springing from the rock in the hollow of the gap, the purest and most colourless water I ever saw, that made the teeth ache as it entered the mouth. This, with some tufts of grass growing in the chinks of the rock, and an enormous half-burned pine, felled, I suppose, by lightning, determined me on choosing the place for our camp, being near, too, to the summit of the first ridge.

We unpacked all the animals, leaving the horses behind, from their being indifferent mountaineers, and descended again only with the mules for the remainder of the loading, as they did not require over two hands to drive them. The rest of the men remained to aid in the first waggon attempt, which we commenced with five pair of mules , and long ropes made fast to the fore-carriage on each side, which were carried up and hitched round trees above, with men to take in the slack, and hold what they got at each stop, to prevent it pulling back the mules as they paused to breathe; from the point of the tongue, also, a rope was passed up, which twelve men hauled on, leaving next thing to nothing of draught. Under this *modus operandi* we made the trial, and got on with remarkable success, the chief annoyance and danger being occasioned by the down rolling rocks and stones, which did inflict some nasty 331 shin cuts. The fourth ascent was with the waggons—far the worst—for over and above the bad turn there were no trees within reach to coil the ropes round, leaving everything to depend on bone and sinew. Immediately after the start one of the centre span had a fall, which, if it occurred higher up, would have been ruinous—most probably, fatal; but in the second effort they got up to the turning all safe. Here it was necessary to shorten the team, otherwise the leaders would be round, out of sight, and beyond all control, just as the waggon would be in the most dangerous spot. We consequently took off three spans and got round

in safety, with very little to spare, for I was curious enough to measure, and found the outside wheels traversed on an average within four inches of the giddy edge. We brought back the same team for the second waggon, and to my great grief lost a pair of them on the last ascent, the waggon at one of the stops overpowering the men and dragging the team back with awful violence. One of the mules had a hind leg broken, and the knee-joint of the other was so lacerated that the inner membrane was perfectly stripped, rendering both useless, and causing them such torture that death was a relief; so I had, getting up the third waggon and cart with comparative handiness.

All up, we took off our hats and made the echoes of the Sierra Nevada acquainted with the mode of cheering in good society, which, their want of opportunities considered, they imitated with very commendable 332 accuracy. Few would have thought, as evening closed upon us in our eyrie, sitting shivering round a pine fire that would roast an elephant, with blankets and buffalo robes on our shoulders, encircled by the hoar lineaments of winter, and the lurid flames casting their murky tinge on the spotless drapery just above us, that we were in the middle of the rabid dog-days of July; and, while our friends at home were languidly sucking sherry-cobler through their straws, we were boiling the kettle for a bubbling tumbler of hot brandy-punch, “the great wonder being,” as Paddy Blake once remarked, “that it was so much *coulder* up there, so much more konvaynient to the sun.”

In our innocent simplicity we now regarded ourselves as on the summit of the Great Sierra Nevada, imagining we could step on the morrow into the glittering Valley of the Sacramento, and commence business at sight. Next day, however, as we got through the gap, we descended into a valley, but not the one we set our hearts on, which did not, however, lie near so low as that we ascended from; nevertheless, we had frightful bumping and sliding before we got to the bottom. It was circumvented with snow-capped peaks, the soil being most fertile, watered by a good sized river, but where it found its exit I did not stop to inquire. We crossed it in a due west course, and wound up the opposite ridge in a serpentine maze, through a thickly-wooded forest of enormous pines peculiar to the region, and after attaining a great elevation sidled round its southern shoulder, and descended into another sheltered 333 valley far above the level of the one we lately left. Here we halted to noon, as we saw the trail crept up a ridge to westward of us that penetrated into the

regions of perpetual snow, and above which none others seemed to peep, so that we set it down as the great dividing range of the chain. We commenced our ascent at twelve o'clock, packing the saddle-horses as well as the other stock, and got on exceedingly well till we came to the snow, the nature of the side admitting of the trail taking such long winds that the inclination, except in a few places, was not excessively sharp. On coming to the snow, the ascent was so abrupt and smooth I sent twelve men ahead, picking foot-holds for the animals, the others remaining to haul on the ropes and assist the mules; and, as the wheels had no obstacles to check them or jolt over, and the mules took advantage of the holes to stick their feet in with admirable sagacity, we went up with great expedition, having all up, time enough to descend on the other side below the snowy limits to a camping-ground.

We had another piercingly cold night, and in addition to the potatory expedients usual in such extreme cases, we were driven to adopt the Indian tactics, building two enormous fires, and sleeping without tents between them. We seemed as yet to be in the centre of a mountainous system, peaks pointing up at every point of the compass, and no indication of a valley or a contiguous flat country. There were many trying ascents and descents the next day, but our progress was evidently downwards, travelling a good deal on the backs of ridges, and whenever we descended, being obliged to 334 go straight down and up to the highest point of the opposite hill, as from the sharp peaky conical character of their formation there was no such thing as going round the side of them without overturning, unless by cutting a track for the waggons, which would be too much of a constantly recurring task. You can fancy going from the point of one sugar-loaf to another, and easily conceive the utter impracticability of taking any other course with wheeled vehicles except round the bases, which, together with being so tortuous, were absolutely impassable, from the close and matted nature of the planting, and the manner in which they were most generally cut up by the torrents that rush down from the higher ridges; otherwise those hills presented a most curious and pleasing appearance, differing in rotundity and altitude, but all shaped according to the same model, feathered round with enormous pines, which, though gigantic, appeared quite in character and keeping with the region in which they flourished. I stepped one of them that was struck down by lightning, which took ninety-three long steps, about two hundred and

seventy-nine feet; though a good piece was broken off the point, which with what remained of the stump I am sure would make three hundred feet; and yet it was not one of exceeding pro portions.

The hills were all composed of reddish earth, the apex of a few just tipped with snow, with scarcely any surface rocks or stones, and, except in the hollows, altogether free of brush or underwood. Scores of black-tailed deer were seen during the day, and right upon the path the trail of a grizly bear, that, from 335 the numerous small paw prints, was followed by a large litter of cubs. Some of the men ran the trail a long distance, without being able to bring them to view. We were much inconvenienced from the want of water, all the streams being quite dry, as the full season of the thaw had passed; and not meeting a drop all day I felt anxious, when night came on, and the moon arose in her azure domain, producing a truly magnificent effect, as we travelled under her chaste cold light for many hours through those vast colonnades of nature, the lofty trees seeming to support on their extreme points the resplendent canopy above, while we, like animated atoms, moved slowly along through those stupendous arcades. It was past one o'clock when the intuitive braying of the mules proclaimed the proximity of what we desired; shortly after which we came to a slender rivulet of good water, flowing through a quick shelving hollow, very difficult to get into, and vastly more so to get out. Some of the horses, after several ineffectual efforts, finding it impracticable, commenced rambling up the bed of the stream, where a party of men were obliged to follow over two miles before a spot offered for extricating them.

From this hollow we ascended a high ridge next morning, along the back of which we travelled, in a winding course, the greater part of the day, descending perceptibly all the time, getting at intervals a glimpse of the open level space to the westward, where lay the Valley of the Sacramento; but the lofty trees circumscribed the view, and although, from the peaks behind, we saw we had made a great descent, there was no 336 vestige or appearance of flowering shrub or luscious fruit, with which we heard the western slope over-abounded; nor was there a feathered chorister to break the still silence with its notes of woodland melody.

We came, early in the afternoon, on a well-beaten narrow path, like to an Indian trail, that diverged from the path, which I had the curiosity to follow, and found it led to a nice cool-shaded stream,

and through the trees could see an open grassy space, which looked to me as if it had been cleared by settlers; but on entering it I discovered it was a natural basin of rich alluvion, with a crop of grass and clover, fitter for the scythe than browsing on. I went immediately back and stopped the waggons, fixing the camp where they were, and driving the stock to the basin, where I left a guard to watch them. Immediately round the verge of the basin there were clumps of low bushy shrubs, with deep green foliage, bearing a profusion of red berries, called by the natives the Californian apple, in botany the manzanita (little apple), which sheds its bark annually, leaving a handsome polished purple surface. The Indians use the wood for arrows, and call it in their language arrow-wood. In examining those I saw an animal, much like our hare in shape, with amazing large ears, and of a light grey colour; it did not move with the fleetness of the hare, but, when frightened, gave great, high, awkward bounds, very unfavourable to progression. I also saw many bear tracks amongst the manzanita, of the fruit of which they are very fond, but was not fortunate enough to get a peep at the great original.

337

Before dark one of the guard came up, reporting the neighbourhood of Indians, and asking for additional strength, which I willingly accorded, for, having come through such an extent of Indian territory scathless mainly owing to our cautious watchfulness, I would not now relax on the very threshold of our destination; and it was well I did not, for a considerable body of Indians came down during the night, making an attempt to drive off the stock; and no doubt would have succeeded only for the reinforcement. The report of the shots reached the camp, and brought down all hands, but before our arrival the affair had terminated.

About eight miles of gradually descending travel from our camp brought us into a level valley, principally timbered with large white oak and the evergreen species (*Quercus ilex*); this, as we afterwards learned, is called by the miners Pleasant Valley. In the spring and earlier months I have no doubt that it abounds in features which deserve that appellation; at that time, however, everything was so parched and burned up, that although the configuration of the country left nothing to be desired, it had an aspect very incompatible with pleasurable emotions. I saw several bevies of quail, a little larger and much darker in the plumage than those peculiar to Britain; the

cock, too, having a crest, like a cockatoo, which he elevated or depressed at pleasure, giving the little bird quite an imposing appearance.

At the westernmost extremity of the valley (which extends five or six miles) we encountered some Chilians on the banks of a little stream, all but dried up, 338 looking for what we came thousands of miles in quest of. It is scarcely necessary to state we halted to noon in their neighbourhood, to have our long day-dream interpreted, and see with mortal eyes the process of picking and washing gold from the common clay. The operations just there happened to be on a limited scale; nevertheless, little as it was, it appeared marvellous to us, to see pansful of mud and dirt gathered, and, after a very short and simple species of washing, to find in the bottom of the basins a deposit of the veritable stuff itself; after which the doubts and fears, which, like the misty vapours of a summer's morning, hovered and floated over our brilliant expectations, rolled away and vanished as the golden sun became revealed. It was now no longer an exaggerated fiction about the treasures of California; there was gold, and no mistake, mixed up with the very surface-clay of the country, a part and parcel of the soil, causing our friend of Goose Creek celebrity to go at it again, cheering and hurrahing *like anything*, to the great amazement of the strangers, who evidently thought he must have escaped from restraint. One of the Chilians, who understood a little English, told us their party were in Weber Creek, about nine miles further down, and that they came away to look for new diggings. They gave us a promising account of the gold regions in general, so far as their experience went, showing that any man who was industrious would be certain to be well repaid for his labours, if his health permitted him to continue at it steadily. He also told us that provisions were scarce and dear in the diggings; and 339 that mules and waggons were selling at enormous rates.

We went on the same evening, passing through a few miners' huts in a deep valley, which was called Weber Town. Here there was what are called, in professional phraseology, “dry diggins;” that is, where miners dig in the dry soil, picking out the particles from amongst the clay without the agency of water. Of course it must be plentiful, and in good sized grains, when the eye can detect them mixed with the red clay; and much that is in mere dust must necessarily escape in the first instance, but in the wet season many of them wash their heaps over that they dry picked before, and with very great success. I sat for half an hour by the side of a digger, watching how he worked,

during which he frequently pointed me out particles in the earth, before he picked them out, that would certainly escape an unpractised eye. He admitted he averaged one and a half ounce per day, working only about six hours.

About four miles lower down, passing through a hilly country, mixedly timbered with oak and fir, we came to a branch of Weber Creek, winding through an extensive basin, openly wooded, but offering good feed along the stream. There was an excellent well, too, and a large encampment of Chilians, Mexicans, and a few Americans from the coast. Here we also came to the determination of fixing our quarters, and making our maiden essays, pending further inquiries. Although not absolutely in the Valley of Sacramento, we now regarded our great journey as accomplished, on the 26th day of July; thus having occupied one hundred 340 and two days, including stoppages, in getting over two thousand and forty-three miles; and feeling inexpressible gratitude to that beneficent Being who carried us through all the trials and perils attendant on it with such great success. As I reviewed in my reflections that night all the dangers and difficulties inseparable from such an arduous undertaking—travelling in waggons over barren and trackless wastes, through tribes of savage Indians, fording and ferrying broad and rapid rivers, scaling giddy heights, crossing burning deserts, and sidling round frightful precipices—the small amount of casualties appeared truly astonishing; and although the hardships and privations of the road are a testing ordeal for temper, there was no misunderstanding of a serious nature occurred throughout, made up as the party was not only of strangers, but of various sects, and natives of different countries.

Being, as I may say, in the first flight of the great overland emigration, and the foremost, too, of that flight, we had many difficulties to contend with from which subsequent caravans were exempt. For instance, we had for the most part to break fresh paths, which were all the more travelable by those that followed; to make corduroy roads across morasses, dig away river banks, cut down and remove obstacles, construct rude bridges, force paths through craggy cañons, smooth the ascent of escalades, ford and ferry over broad and rapid rivers, where ferries have since been established, and carry provisions for the whole route; whereas, now, there are various replenishing depôts on the route; the great thoroughfare, too, rendering the attacks and incursions 341 of hostile Indians less

frequent and audacious; so that, in fact, what to us was a journey of perpetual doubt, difficulty, toil, and danger, can now be only properly designated as one of weariness and occasional privation.

The morning after our arrival I called all the party together, took an inventory of the effects of the two unfortunate young men who forfeited their lives in the expedition, and afterwards packed and sealed them up, writing to their friends an account of their melancholy fate; having an opportunity of forwarding the letters by one of our party, who was going to the city of Sacramento to consult a friend of his there as to whether gold digging or commerce was the most lucrative mode of employing his time.

Before taking leave of the Great Sierra Nevada for the present, it may be proper to remark that its eastern side differs materially in structure from its western flank; for while on the one the range rises in abrupt elevations, it subsides on the other in graduated lines of hills, that spread away in declining altitude until they melt into the Valley of Sacramento. I heard much discussion in the States before I left on the contemplated railway over the continent to the Pacific, which may be possible, from the insensibly sloping nature of the country from the Kansas River to the summit of the Rocky Mountains, in which great distance their great elevation would not involve any insuperable gradient; but even admitting this, and that scientific scrutiny could tread its way through the mazes and cañons in the Great Basin, I cannot conceive how the precipitous sides of the Sierra Nevada are to be surmounted by a 342 locomotive, unless it be constructed on a *mule* power principle, of Yankee invention, the secret of which they have as yet kept to themselves. Or perhaps they design a tunnel as the mode of dealing with the obstruction; and all I can say in that event is, that if they succeed they will effectually shut *Mr. Punch's* mouth as to his great national vaunt “about having the greatest bore in the world in that of the Thames.”

I will here subjoin a short table of distances, as well as I could calculate them, allowing two and a half miles per hour as the rate of travelling when the trail was good and unobstructed, and making liberal and large deductions for all delays, accidents, and stoppages, beginning my count from the frontier town of Independence:

DISTANCE TABLE FROM INDEPENDENCE, MISSOURI, TO SAN FRANCISCO, ALTA CALIFORNIA. MILES. From Independence to Fort Laramie 700

“ Laramie to the Pacific Springs 325

“ Pacific Springs to Fort Bridger 130

“ Fort Bridger to Salt Lake City 112

“ Salt Lake City to the head-waters of Humboldt River 329

“ Humboldt River to its Sink 290

“ The Sink to the base of the Sierra Nevada 157

“ The Eastern base to Weber Creek (our encampment) 115

2043

“ Weber Creek to Sacramento City 38

“ Sacramento City to San Francisco, by the river 150

Total distance from Independence to San Francisco 2346

END OF VOL. I.